

## CUGH Newsletter Submission

Title: Progressing through Perseverance for Healthcare in South Sudan and the Gambella Region of Ethiopia

Martha Sommers<sup>a</sup>, Barry Bacon<sup>b</sup>, Gugo Kwot<sup>c</sup>, Gatbel Chamjock<sup>d</sup>

Anchor Healthcare, South Sudan. Gambella Medical Team Connections, Ethiopia. <sup>a</sup>Marshall University, USA. <sup>b</sup>Washington State University, USA. <sup>c</sup>Mayo Clinic, USA. <sup>d</sup>Unity Point Hospital System, USA.

South Sudan's and Western Ethiopia's experience of suffering war, violence and displacement for decades is well documented, as is the lack of quality health services, medical education, and among the world's worst health outcomes. Statistics include one doctor per 65,574 patients, and the loss of \$200 million per year for South Sudan from residents outsourcing medical care.<sup>1</sup> Findings from our recent visit to Gambella found one functioning x-ray machine for 5 hospitals, and one blood pressure cuff for the entire Gambella nursing school.

The border between South Sudan and Gambella, Ethiopia is porous, and more than 370,000 South Sudanese refugees remain in the Gambella region.<sup>2</sup> Some 30 years ago, many refugees, especially young men, traveled from South Sudan and Ethiopia through Kenya, to the USA. Some were able to gain education and skills; and heard the plea to the Ethiopia and South Sudanese diaspora to return to assist, and to recruit others to join the efforts. The nongovernment organizations Gambella Medical Team Connections in Ethiopia and Anchor Health in South Sudan were formed to answer the plea by focusing on developing quality healthcare through developing a medical school to train committed local doctors, and through this effort, to promote peace.

The five years of relationship building through support and continuing education with the hospitals and health personnel in Gambella has led to the signing this year of Memorandums of Understanding with the State of Gambella's departments of health and education, and the College of Health Sciences in Gambella exploring how they can petition the Ethiopian government to host the medical school now that they are also approved to train nurses for bachelors degrees. The huge challenges even these last months include major flooding and outside militias attacking the town. Still, by working together, Gambella primary hospital opened their operating room with appropriately functioning equipment, and villagers have taken note of how members of our team who are from different tribes in conflict are welcomed in each other's villages, sharing meals.

A Memorandum of Understanding has also been signed with the Ministry of Health of the Republic of South Sudan. The Articles of understanding include health service delivery, human resource development, health financing, health system strengthening, and leadership and governance. The best location for a medical school which will be attached to a teaching hospital and where no people groups will be targeted for violence if they come for services or education has proved to be difficult as much of the country outside of Juba is controlled by militias. Meetings have taken place between members of

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<sup>1</sup> [borgenproject.org/healthcare-in-south-sudan](https://borgenproject.org/healthcare-in-south-sudan)

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR 2019 Progress report

Anchor Health and the Minister of Education, USAID, leaders of community health providers, faculty of Juba University and other interested parties during July, 2022. Our in- country director continues these dialogues, and communication continues internationally through cyberspace, especially making use of ZOOM and Whatsapp.

As the dream takes shape, we have been able to gain guidance and explore how to involve our partners and networks. Partners In Health has met with us as we flesh out how to meet what they refer to as the 5 S's: Staff, Stuff, Space, Systems, and Social Support.<sup>3</sup> Two of us represent universities, Marshall University and Mayo Clinic, where conversations on expanding involvement once the teaching hospital is functioning have begun. Two of us are family physicians, and have enjoyed the forums the American Academy of Family Practice and the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine have offered to present and discuss our progress. Many of us have ties to mission organizations which have long-term involvement in the region, and which have shared contacts, guidance, and the possibility of personnel support.

Those of us who have joined the dream are privileged and honored to be led by our team members- including those on the ground and those who have returned home.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.pih.org/article/pihs-five-ss-essential](http://www.pih.org/article/pihs-five-ss-essential).