

Mengistu and Lielit

Mengistu is a 71-year-old man from Ethiopia and Lielit is his 60-year-old wife. They immigrated to Washington, DC in January, 2007 from Ethiopia to live with their adult son. Their son was already a patient at Columbia Road Health Services (CRHS) when his parents came to live with him. He had grown to trust the staff at CRHS, so he brought his parents to us to try to manage some of their medical concerns.

Before they saw the doctor, Mengistu and Lielit met me. I am also Ethiopian and provided translation services for them. They mentioned to the doctor that they had been diagnosed with diabetes when they were in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, they were unable continue to see a doctor, which meant that their condition was uncontrolled. This put them at serious risk for complications, including blindness and kidney failure. They both also had high blood pressure.

Mengistu and Lielit enrolled in our Diabetes Collaborative, a program we have implemented at the clinic to improve the outcomes of our patients. This program allows us to provide case management visits that allow for individualized patient education and goal-setting. Mengistu and Lielit clearly needed extensive education about their condition and how to treat it. For instance, Lielit put all of her medications in one bottle and did not understand how often she should take each. We told her about the importance of taking medication correctly, and she is able to follow the instructions. We were also able to provide them with glucometers so that they could track their own blood sugar levels. Both of their blood sugar levels decreased as a result of medication and careful monitoring.

Following their first appointment, one of our case managers helped the couple apply for enrollment in the DC HealthCare Alliance, a local medical subsidy program, which would provide them with access to medical services at a reduced cost. Their enrollment in this program was very helpful because the couple also had individual medical concerns. After arriving in the U.S., Lielit started having chronic ear infections that were not only uncomfortable, but also caused hearing loss. As a participant in the DC HealthCare Alliance, we were able to send Lielit to a specialist to stop her infections and clear up her hearing loss.

Mengistu was able to see an ophthalmologist with our help and was diagnosed with cataracts. He would need to have surgery to remove the cataracts, but his blood pressure was too high. Dr. Wanko prescribed blood pressure medication and monitored him over the next few months. Finally, in January 2009, his pressure was down to a level where he could safely undergo surgery. He is looking forward to being able to see clearly again soon.

Mengistu and Lielit will continue to need continuous care to keep their diabetes and other conditions in check. Hopefully, with our help, they will be able to live out their lives in good health.

Yeshimbet Gebreyes
CRHS Medical Assistant



A patient in the Diabetes Collaborative receives a routine examination of his feet by a Medical Assistant to ensure that they are in good health.