On June 17th, 2015, the Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Addis Ababa University (AAU), officially establishing the first PhD in Nursing program in Ethiopia. Dr. Getnet Yimer, the Associate Dean for Research in the College of Health Sciences at AAU was present for the signing and lauded the program. “This is not a historic moment because it is the first nursing PhD program in Ethiopia or because of the partnership with Emory,” Dr. Getnet said. “It is historic because we will no longer hinder the learning of our nursing students who want to go beyond a bachelors or masters. We will allow them to continue their learning for the first time.” Dr. Getnet will head the PhD in Nursing program at AAU until a PhD in Nursing graduate can assume permanent leadership.

The AAU PhD in Nursing program will train health care workers, nurses, and midwives through research oriented training. Students in the program will take doctoral courses at AAU, primarily in the School of Public Health; they will receive AAU doctoral credits for four Emory School of Nursing doctoral level courses in which they will participate via Skype. After their second semester of studies, AAU PhD in Nursing students will visit Emory for a three-week workshop to craft their dissertation proposals, with Emory School of Nursing faculty serving as members of AAU students' doctoral committees.

The establishment of a PhD in Nursing in Ethiopia, focusing on research, is an indication of a new health policy promoted by the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, Dr. Getnet expressed. He said, “The Ethiopian government is committed to improving health. Ethiopian health policy used to focus on preventable diseases. The new health policy addresses tertiary care, like non-communicable diseases, trauma, emergency care, and the health effects of aging.” Part of this commitment to improving health is a
commitment to improving the quality of education within the country.

In the past, Ethiopia has suffered from the emigration of its most educated citizens in search of more opportunities abroad. Dr. Getnet acknowledged the toll that brain drain has played on Ethiopian society and noted that retention of health care workers is key to a successful healthcare industry. He said that Ethiopian health education institutions need to “increase the quality of training.” He continued, “Now, the Ethiopian government is focused on quality, quality, quality. This PhD program will boost quality.” Dr. Getnet expects the research conducted by the PhD students to eventually influence Ethiopian health policy, with graduates expected to attain positions in the Ministry of Health, health research institutions, and Ethiopian universities.

Dr. Robert Breiman, Director of the Emory Global Health Institute, said about the new program: “This is a robust and vibrant vision. We hope in the end that the program will contribute to better quality of life for Ethiopians and serve as an example to other countries.” Dr. Getnet echoed that sentiment, saying that nursing is the “backbone” of the medical profession. Through establishing this partnership with Emory University, AAU “will serve as an example to other partners and countries of how fruitful a collaboration can be. AAU will become a center for regional excellence” influencing other universities to establish similar programs.

The MOU establishes a five year partnership between Emory University and Addis Ababa University with a hope for potential growth beyond the initial commitment. The first class of three to five students is expected to begin their studies Fall 2015.

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Dr. Robert Breiman (Emory Global Health Institute), Dr. Getnet Yimer (Addis Ababa University), and Dr. Kenneth Hepburn (Woodruff School of Nursing)