

Getting to know the first class of The PSF's SHARE program in Africa

By Paul Snyder

Although it wasn't originally intended to be an entirely virtual format, the first year of The PSF's Surgeons in Humanitarian Alliance for Reconstructive, Research and Education (SHARE) program is off to a strong start, with the virtual format forced by the global COVID-19 pandemic actually providing increased opportunities for participation.

"A lot of this was supposed to take place in-person, with a boot camp in Kenya and the opportunity to bring our learners to Plastic Surgery The Meeting," notes Amanda Gosman, MD, who, along with The PSF past President Andrea Pusic, MD, MHS, helped steer the creation of the program. "Interestingly, I think the program has benefited from the travel ban because we've been able to include twice as many learners. The virtual format is perfect for a lot of what we're doing, and there are all these opportunities to extend the reach of what we're doing. It also allowed us to engage some fantastic subject-matter experts and resources that wouldn't have been possible if we were doing it in person."

Dr. Gosman calls the first group of SHARE learners from sub-Saharan Africa a dynamic collection that's very engaged and already providing valuable case examples and lessons about working with limited resources to the ASPS members involved in the program. If you are interested in taking part in SHARE as a mentor or to provide resources or knowledge, you can learn more and get involved at thepsf.org/share. Residents and medical students are encouraged to take part as collaborators in the program.

Here are some quick portraits of the African learners involved in the first iteration of SHARE:



Metasebia Abebe, MD
Ethiopia

Mentors: Amanda Gosman, MD; Noopur Gangopadhyay, MD

Dr. Abebe is a young plastic surgeon in Ethiopia, a country with more than 110 million people, but less than 100 plastic surgeons. As a result of the socioeconomic conditions in the country and a lack of access to healthcare, patients often go to the hospital in advanced stages of their condition, which often requires complex reconstructive surgery that necessitates collaboration among multiple surgeons. The mentorship opportunities provided through SHARE are of particular interest to her, as she says the lessons learned can immediately be applied in her own daily decision-making and management approaches to the complex cases she regularly sees.

"This program is also a platform to create collaboration between surgeons and a network to strengthen the practice of plastic surgery, but also to conduct surgical campaigns in the remote, rural areas of the country," Dr. Abebe says. "The life experiences of the surgeons involved in SHARE, with the variety within their scope of practice, will be of invaluable input to my career planning and future in plastic surgery."



Wone Banda, MD
Malawi

Mentors: Debra Ann Reilly, MD; Renata Maricevich, MD

Dr. Banda is not only the only plastic surgeon working at a public hospital in Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi (which serves a population of roughly 10 million people), she's also the only female plastic surgeon in the country. With a heavy volume of patients and no one with whom to mentor or exchange ideas, she says she has to rely on the skills and knowledge gained during residency unless she can expand her knowledge base by pursuing a Fellowship elsewhere. That's why she says the importance of SHARE cannot be overstated.

"It enables me to learn from my peers, as well as more senior and, indeed, far more experienced plastic surgeons to improve my techniques, knowledge and skillset," Dr. Banda says. "There are numerous opportunities for collaboration in research and education, as well as mentorship. As I would like to start a training program back home in order to train more plastic surgeons, these collaborations would be invaluable in the long run."



Phillip Makoye, MD
Tanzania

Mentors: Samuel Lin, MD; Carlos Damián Palafox Vidal, MD; Oren Lerman, MD

Currently in general surgery residency, Dr. Makoye's interest in plastic surgery sparked during his time at the Bugando Medical Centre Burns Unit, which led him to pursue short-term courses and hands-on training for treatment of burn patients. To date, he has taken part in nearly 300 reconstructive surgery cases. After he graduates from his training program, he plans to join an MSc plastic surgery training program. He says the goal of his time in SHARE is to further himself and his knowledge, and thereby serve his community by handling both general and plastic surgery procedures with a commitment to providing care to all.

"My dream is to become a plastic surgeon so that I can serve my community in Tanzania and East Africa," Dr. Makoye says. "I also want my hospital to specialize in trauma and reconstructive surgery."



Edwin Mrema, MD
Tanzania

Mentors: Richard Redett, MD; Raj Vyas, MD

Dr. Mrema is a surgeon at Muhimbili National Hospital, a tertiary facility with more than 1,800 beds in Tanzania. Of that total, 60 beds are allocated to the plastic surgery and burn unit. The hospital receives a significant number of both cancer and trauma patients who have multiple defects to hands, head and neck, trunks, as well as extremities — and many of these cases are left unattended as a result of the lack of expertise (and training) in microsurgery and hand surgery. The demand for safe, quality reconstructive surgery is immense in the country, which Dr. Mrema says motivated him to seek more formal training.

"The skills acquired will be transferred to my fellow surgeons and surgical residents, as well as other members in the department through in-house training," he says. "Consequently, it will benefit our fellow countrymen who are in great need of plastic surgery services."



Irene Asaba Mugisha, MBChB, MMed
Uganda

Mentors: Andrea Pusic, MD, MHS; Lydia Helliwell, MD

Dr. Mugisha specializes in plastic surgery in Uganda, a country she says is not only low on plastic surgeons, but also on the resources necessary to train them. Although she has been able to travel to different countries for conferences, workshops and training courses, she says her aspiration with SHARE is to further advance her knowledge of plastic surgery and train future generations of plastic surgeons in the country.

"It has always been my passion to participate in international educational programs, mainly for the exposure to best global surgical practices, as well as enrichment of my knowledge and skill base that I can transfer to future surgeons in my country," Dr. Mugisha says. "I believe that taking part in SHARE will enable me to help grow and equip the plastic surgery workforce, collaborate in research programs and contribute to building this under-resourced surgical specialty in my country."



Meklit Kidane, MD
Ethiopia

Mentors: Christine Rohde, MD; Michelle Coriddi, MD

Dr. Kidane notes that plastic surgery is a relatively young specialty in Ethiopia, and as a young surgeon, she sees the SHARE program as a unique opportunity to not only learn from scholars around the world who she might not otherwise meet, but also to access a wealth of educational resources, journal articles and surgical videos to improve both her skills and knowledge as a plastic surgeon. She has already been involved in hands-on training sessions and clinical evaluation of both outpatients and inpatients and says she hopes to pass on knowledge to other surgeons in the community.

"Research is one of the strong pillars of plastic surgery, and I aspire to be engaged in research jointly with other colleagues and use ASPS EdNet as a platform to interact and collaborate with fellow surgeons," Dr. Kidane says. "I believe networking is the way to achieve a solid, yet dynamic, learning center — and I'm keen to be involved in the mentorship program."



Ibrahim Mkoma, MD
Tanzania

Mentors: Simon Talbot, MD; Aparajit Naram, MD

Dr. Mkoma is a general surgeon at the Muhimbili National Hospital, the largest government teaching hospital in Tanzania, in the Burn, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Unit. While Tanzania is one of the largest countries in eastern Africa, with a population of more than 60 million, only two plastic surgeons practice within its borders. Dr. Mkoma notes that many children are born with deformities such as cleft lip and/or palate, and an increasing number of patients suffer trauma, burn injuries and cancer.

"The demand for timely, safe and quality plastic surgery in Tanzania is very high and the need is urgent," he says. "Our hospital has a strategic plan to have at least six plastic surgeons by 2022, and I'm among the trainees in this field. Due to a shortage of trained and qualified plastic surgeons in the country — and in this part of the world — I'm going to provide both clinical services and training in the future. I believe joining SHARE will provide me with important and useful tools toward accomplishing these goals."



Matolase Mtonga, MD
Zambia

Mentors: Debra Johnson, MD; Phong Nguyen, MD

Dr. Mtonga says her journey into plastic surgery was spurred by the state of burn care in Zambia, which she calls "distinctly undesirable." Now practicing while studying at University Teaching Hospitals, she says she's convinced that the care for burn patients can be improved in the country, as changes are underway that provide hope not only to burn victims but also to patients who suffer various disfiguring ailments. She says SHARE offers an opportunity to open the channels of communication and consultation with a global network of experts, which could pay dividends for the country — and sub-Saharan Africa — moving forward.

"We currently have a single plastic surgeon to cater to a population of over 18 million Zambians," Dr. Mtonga notes. "I believe we will have at the very least quadrupled this number in the next three to five years and will continue to grow that number going forward. Also, it's important that women continue to grow into the fields of plastic surgery and take on both leadership and mentorship roles. I plan to continue to assist and facilitate the growth and competencies of the burns team, which has been instrumental during my tenure here, and to replicate their dedication and teamwork nationally so that we can achieve the best care for our patients. It is possible."

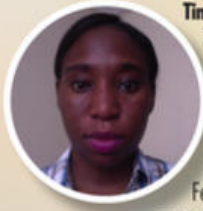


Françoise Mukagaju, MD
Rwanda

Mentors: Arun Gosain, MD; Marco Maricevich, MD

Dr. Mukagaju, who has a background in general surgery, enrolled in a plastic surgery Fellowship through the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA). She says she first dreamed of becoming a plastic surgeon during her rotation in plastic surgery during general surgery training, and she continued to attend various reconstructive surgery courses. She says the SHARE program presents a "golden opportunity" to fulfill her dream not only of becoming a plastic surgeon, but also of helping the people of her country who face delays in care resulting from the scarcity of plastic surgeons in Rwanda. She says that in addition to the training, she's particularly excited by the access to various ASPS educational resources, including PRS, the international In-Service Exam, ASPS University and the EdNet Resident Educational Curriculum.

"It will not only benefit me, but also my patients and my country, as this will contribute to making me a good plastic surgeon," she says. "I also plan to be one of the trainers and share the knowledge that I've gained after completion of my studies."



Tingadini Nyoni, MD
Zimbabwe

Mentors: Devra Becker, MD; Chris Hughes, MD, MPH

Dr. Nyoni currently works at Parirenyatwa Group of Hospitals in Zimbabwe as a trainee in the Department of Plastic Surgery and is currently in the final year of a Fellowship program for plastic surgery through COSECSA. Upon completion of that Fellowship, she will become the fourth plastic surgeon in the country. She hopes to pursue training in hand surgery, as there are no hand surgeons currently in the country. She sees SHARE as something that gives her — and Zimbabwe — the potential to elevate patient care and expertise.

"My hospital happens to be the only hospital with a plastic surgery department in the country," Dr. Nyoni says. "Despite being a very small and young department, I feel we have the potential to develop into a robust pillar of much-needed service with the help of opportunities such as SHARE that make learning resources more accessible. I believe it will provide me with the unique opportunity to access tools that would have otherwise been out of reach."



Pedro Santos, MD
Mozambique

Mentors: C. Scott Hultman, MD, MBA; Mark Albert, MD

Dr. Santos is the only plastic surgeon in the public hospital of Matola, Mozambique, but he's been pursuing further education in the specialty for more than a decade, including taking part in a Fellowship in Brazil. He says he has a longstanding interest in educational activities that surround plastic surgery and has even been able to travel to a variety of educational events abroad — including Plastic Surgery The Meeting 2019 in San Diego. Dr. Santos says he works hard to stay up to date on the latest research, but being the only plastic surgeon in a hospital presents a challenge in terms of developing and implementing new ideas.

"I strongly feel that my participation in this program will allow me to improve my skills as a surgeon, to grow as a person and to establish crucial connections for future collaborations," he says. "But this also extends beyond me to a country of 30 million inhabitants with three plastic surgeons. There's a gap in training opportunities in my country — and SHARE will allow me to set up a training program for future plastic and reconstructive surgery residents, which would ultimately benefit my fellow Mozambicans."



Frances Tegete, MD
Tanzania

Mentors: Andrew Wexler, MD; Sean Figy, MD

Dr. Tegete is a junior plastic surgeon who describes himself as "self-motivated, hard-working, dynamic, equipped with a love of learning, good problem-solving skills, a determination to succeed, as well as strong communication and analytical skills." He says he's not only ready to increase his surgical skillset, but also to network and collaborate with everyone involved in the SHARE program. He says the country's gap between available plastic surgeons and patients is the result of a lack of plastic surgeons to train the next generation and a lack of curriculum in the country's medical schools. Dr. Tegete says SHARE is a way to start filling that gap.

"Once I complete the program, I want to build a platform at my local hospital that will connect SHARE and local surgeons, and therefore to build plastic surgical capacity and foster skills in various areas that have need this kind of patient care," he says. "But I also want to bring awareness to many doctors in the country about the field of plastic surgery through the online education and other opportunities offered by SHARE."



Bereket Worku, MD
Ethiopia

Mentors: A. Neil Salyapongse, MD; Brian Christie, MD

Dr. Worku practices in the plastic surgery unit in the St. Paul Hospital Millennium Medical College Department of Surgery, a newly constructed unit that he says aspires to be one of the best tertiary-care centers in plastic surgery in Ethiopia. The unit also runs a plastic surgery residency program with five residents, a number that he says is expected to increase annually. In concert with further development of the program, Dr. Worku says he values the opportunity to work with experts from well-developed and world-renowned institutions and pass those lessons on to his own residents and future plastic surgeons.

"This is a great opportunity to learn from state-of-the-art, up-to-date plastic surgery practices, prepare for the international In-Service Exam and secure international accreditation," he says. "All of this will increase the scope and quality of plastic surgery in the hands of myself, my colleagues, my country and the greater region of Africa."



Yves Nezerwa, MBChB, MCS
Rwanda

Mentors: Kevin Hopkins, MD; Christopher Runyan, MD, PhD

Dr. Nezerwa is a senior resident in plastic surgery at Rwanda Military Hospital. In addition to his formal training, he has also taken part in an array of volunteer work, including doing rounds in surgical wards for burns, orthopaedic and emergency work. He says the SHARE program will fortify his training and provide access to a variety of resources and educational material that can be used to improve his training efforts in the future.

"Plastic surgery is the single-most advanced specialty in the medical field, dealing with problems from the top of the head to the tip of the toes," Dr. Nezerwa says. "Being part of this program allows me to learn more from experienced educators who have the same passion as me — and I believe this will help me and positively affect my community in the future."



Angela Penedo, MD
Mozambique

Mentors: Joyce McIntyre, MD; Kavitha Ranganathan, MD

Dr. Penedo is a fourth-year plastic surgery resident from Mozambique, which counts only three plastic surgeons in a country of nearly 29 million people. She notes that through a recent experience participating in a journal club with three American plastic surgeons, she was encouraged to pursue further education in the specialty from experts. She also says she's excited about the opportunity to interact with other surgeons, learn how other residency programs are organized and how other residents around the world prepare in their own training. Dr. Penedo adds that she's also excited to use the knowledge she gains to further her own research efforts.

"There's a tendency to believe that if there was access to technology that's available in a developed country, our patients' fates would be very different," she says. "Even though that's true in some cases, a lot of times — and mainly when dealing with life-threatening situations and emergency surgery — patient care can actually be managed exactly the same way in places with or without limited resources. It's empowering to know, that with the right knowledge, I can provide the best treatment — and wherever my patient goes afterward, any surgeon can say that with the conditions available, he or she had the best treatment possible."



Ian Shyaka, MD
Rwanda

Mentors: Daniel Jaffurs, MD; John Rose, MD

Dr. Shyaka is a plastic surgery resident who trained at Rwanda Military Hospital. He says becoming a plastic surgeon was a dream he held since he was 9 years old and his mother sustained extensive burn wounds following a major traffic accident. The family was told she needed a plastic surgeon for extensive skin-grafting, but there were none in the country at the time. She later died as a result of the complications associated with the accident. Twenty years later, he says the country now has two plastic surgeons for a population of nearly 12 million people.

"During my two years of training in plastic surgery, the reality of the huge disease burden in our country and the region at large has made itself clear," he says. "We have long wait lists for patients that can stretch as long as three years. Handling such work volumes and training at the same time can be very demanding — and worse, when educational resources are limited to access. SHARE provides a great opportunity to access the latest medical journals, and to help me train and practice with evidence-based medicine. This will make me a better plastic surgeon, ready to serve my people to the greatest standard of care, as well as training future plastic surgeons in the country."



Zenebe Teklu, MD
Ethiopia

Mentors: Richard Korentager, MD; Johanna Riesel, MD

Dr. Teklu is an assistant professor of surgery at the Jimma University Medical Center in the Department of Surgery in Ethiopia and a current Fellow for COSECSA. He also serves as the head of the plastic surgery and burn unit at the hospital and volunteered for Operation Smile mission work on multiple occasions. He's excited not only by the training and mentorship provided by SHARE, but also the access to ASPS EdNet educational materials.

"I was working as a general surgeon in the hospital, which served around 20 million people in southwest Ethiopia," Dr. Teklu says. "We didn't have a plastic surgeon in the hospital, so it was on my shoulders to treat patients with burn contractures and cutaneous malignancy, as well as trauma patients. To be able to provide standard service to my patients, I joined the COSECSA Fellowship program, and I believe the resources available in SHARE will further develop my skills and knowledge to help millions of people, as well as establish a strong plastic and reconstructive surgery unit in my university." *PSN*



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