



MDS Africa LEAP: Interviews with Biniyam Alemayehu Ayele and Oluwadamilola Ojo

— Margherita Fabbri, a member of the Moving Along Editorial Board, reached out to the participants from the 2019 MDS LEAP class to learn more about how the program has impacted their careers and contributions to the African region.

Margherita: Thank you for taking the time for an interview for *Moving Along*. First of all, congratulations on being selected for the 2019 LEAP Program. Please tell us your current professional position and your brief biographical sketch.

Biniyam: Thank you very much for interviewing me for *Moving Along*. I am currently serving as an assistant professor of Neurology at Tikur Anbessa Specialized Hospital, Department of Neurology College of Health Sciences Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. I received my doctorate degree from Jimma University in 2010. Following that, I served as a medical director of Bule Hora Hospital for three years. In 2014, I joined the department of Neurology, Addis Ababa University and completed my neurology residency training in January, 2017. On the same year I completed my six-month fellowship training in clinical neurophysiology at Cairo University. In addition, I am also serving as a member of MDS-African Section Education Committee and also part of MDS LEAP class of 2019.



Biniyam Ayele, MD

Recently, we managed to distribute L/dopa (Credanil) donated by World Parkinson Program (WPP) for more than 100 Parkinson's disease patients who has economic problem to cover their six months usage in collaboration with Parkinson Patient Support Organization-Ethiopia (PPSO-E). I am also working closely with Prof. Miriam Redleaf to start "Rock Steady Boxing" training in Ethiopia in collaboration with Parkinson Patient Support Organization-Ethiopia (PPSO-E). Regarding research activities, we are undergoing a facility based clinical research to understand the burden of non-motor symptoms of Parkinson's disease in Ethiopia. I am also part of a multicentre, international research aimed to understand Parkinson's disease genetics, as the study also includes Ethiopia.

Oluwadamilola: Thank you for having me and it is a pleasure! I am currently a senior lecturer at the College of Medicine of the University of Lagos and an honorary consultant neurologist at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Lagos, Nigeria. I received my medical degree at the University of Ilorin and my residency training in internal medicine and neurology at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital and Lagos University Teaching Hospital respectively. I was exposed to Parkinson's disease and the field of Movement Disorders by Prof. Njideka Okubadejo during my neurology training. This interest culminated in a dissertation on an aspect of PD and subsequently a one-year clinical research fellowship under the tutelage of Prof. Hubert Fernandez at the Cleveland Clinic. My current research interests are non-motor features of PD in Nigerians and dystonia in Nigerians. I am married, have two kids and outside work, love movies, fictional books and sports.



Oluwadamilola
Ojo, MBBS

Margherita: Do you know how many neurologists are actually working in your country?

Biniyam: Close to 40, excluding those currently on training.

Oluwadamilola: Approximately 75 - 80 (many more than these have been trained but lost to "brain drain")

Margherita: **Why did you apply for the MDS LEAP Program?**

Biniyam: The MDS LEAP program was established to provide leadership training to young neurologists like me to support our future endeavours to become leaders in the field of Movement Disorders. Leadership trainings like this are vital in building the capacity of a young movement disorder specialist. Since I am actively engaged in movement disorders related activities here in Ethiopia, in terms of clinical activity, research activity focusing on movement disorders and volunteer works, mainly for patients living with Parkinson's disease, attending such leadership training will give me the opportunity to create networks with other colleagues working in all parts of the world and will help me to acquire knowledge and skill regarding leadership and managerial capacity. Finally, such leadership training will give me an opportunity to be involved in different leadership activities in MDS.

Oluwadamilola: I applied for the MDS LEAP program to identify, develop and hone my leadership skills to enable me better train and mentor younger physicians and make a positive impact on healthcare in Nigeria.

Margherita: **What personal goals would you like to achieve through your participation in the MDS Leap Program?**

Biniyam: My future goal is to improve the low quality health service currently given to patients with movement disorders in Ethiopia. So, being part of this LEAP program will give me an opportunity create a network of collaboration which will help me to get fellowship training in movement disorders in order to run the movement disorder care in Ethiopia. In addition, it allows me to live my life in principles and how to work with others in order to make my institution effective. To take part and contribute my share by being part of my institution leadership's positions and MDS leadership positions. The mentorship component of the program is a great experience for me in exposing me to a new experience of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Oluwadamilola: The personal goals I would like to reach courtesy of the LEAP program include self-mastery, acquiring skills required to look at and take on challenges from a different perspective, problem-solving, and becoming a leader who inspires a younger generation of neurologists and movement disorder specialists willing to stay in Nigeria and impact/improve the management and access to care of movement disorder patients, and who are driven to improve health services, research and policy in the country.

Margherita: **How do you imagine your career in five years?**

Biniyam: I would imagine my career in five years in three important areas:
I. Academic and clinical: I will probably complete my fellowship in movement disorders and be able to expand and strengthen the existing movement disorder clinics at my hospital and affiliate hospital.
II. Research: I will conduct different epidemiological and interventional studies in area of movement disorder in Ethiopia, ultimately increasing the data share from Ethiopia, especially in Parkinson's disease genetic areas.
III. Leadership: I will likely be an active member of MDS and will increase my current involvement in the MDS African Section and likely work in one of the top leadership spots in the regional section.

Oluwadamilola: In five years, I want to expand the Movement Disorders Clinic in L.U.T.H. to be the foremost Centre of Excellence for Movement Disorders in Nigeria, West Africa and Africa. I also want to improve/drive health services and policy in my country through my research.

Margherita: **MDS has made targeted and successful efforts to increase the knowledge and interest in movement disorders in underserved areas around the world, including Africa, and has expressed its interest in intensifying these efforts. Do you have any suggestions in line with this specific purpose?**

Biniyam: I would like to thank MDS for creating MDS African Task Force and MDS African Section. A regional section like this will create an opportunity for physicians in underserved countries to upgrade and acquire new knowledge and skills in movement disorders. To further strengthen and maintain current momentum, it's important to train young neurologists in Africa in movement disorders via short trainings or fellowships. This way we can create someone who is fully dedicated to movement disorders and able to establish and maintain the existing service in his/her institute. Finally, I would like to thank *Moving Along* for inviting me for this interview, the MDS LEAP program and Dr. Jim Bower, my MDS LEAP mentor, for his continuous guidance.

Oluwadamilola: Yes, the MDS has increased the interest in Movement Disorders in underserved areas of the world, my country inclusive, through partnership with the African Academy of Neurology, sponsoring Developing World Education Programs (we have had two of such), the MDS Summer and Winter School travel grants and the visiting trainee grants, etc. To intensify these efforts, I think MDS should plan towards a phased partnership with regional and national (country) neurologic societies, with an aim to identify individuals who have a working knowledge of the needs and gaps in their specific locations and who are willing to be mentored to acquire the knowledge and skills, not just for personal improvement or career development, but to make positive changes within their systems. The attention of members from these underserved areas can also be drawn periodically to the online courses on the MDS website (e.g. the Fundamentals courses). MDS can also target attendees from underserved areas at neurology meetings, such as the American Academy of Neurology.