

# **My Observation of the 1st Annual Cancer Awareness Conference awareness held in Atlanta, Georgia on 11/03/2013 by Abera Sisay**

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**Alemtsehay Breast Cancer Foundation (ABC Foundation)** is formed in Atlanta on June 15, 2013.

The primary objective of this foundation is to provide Ethiopian women who live in the United States (US) the awareness and support to treat and screen of breast cancer. The foundation will work with different health and humanitarian organizations in US to help Ethiopian women.

The ABCF held its first Annual Cancer public awareness conference in Atlanta, GA on November 3, 2013. The organizer of the conference had three main goals in mind when planning the conference. The first goal was to identify and define what Breast Cancer



is.

The first goal has many cancer subthemes including the various types of breast cancer, how it will affect us, who will be affected, the techniques for early detection, how we should fight it, and how it will affect patients emotionally.

The second goal was to create awareness about the day-to-day activities about our eating, drinking, and exercise habits. The third goal was the spiritual aspect of our existence. A wide range of topics were covered by the invited guests and speakers who addressed every aspect of the illness. This included testimonial speeches based on the participants personal experiences various types of cancer. The founder and organizer of ABCF, Ms. Fifi Derso directed the conference with the Board Members of the

organization, includes, family, friends, and relatives.



When I first learned about the ABCF conference, I did not think of the importance to Ethiopians in particular. I had listened to the radio interview by Fifi Derso about the ABCF, viewed the announcement posted on EEDN and other media outlets about the conference; close friends across the America talked about the advantage of attending as a gesture of support to our sisters, and to be with our Fifi Derso at the Alemtsehay Breast Cancer Foundation Conference. After we all were able to see how much this meant to our sisters, even to our brothers, many relatives and friends of Fifi Derso gathered in Atlanta from Texas, Alabama, Virginia, Philadelphia, Tennessee, California, and Illinois.

With the help of the community organizations, the Ethiopian Churches, and Ethiopian Restaurants in the greater Atlanta area, the conference became unexpectedly a successful conference. Normally, Ethiopian conferences do not garner a lot of attendance. This one, however, was completely packed, to my surprise! Medical Doctors, Physicians

Assistants, nurses, religious leaders, cancer patients and survivors, and members of the clergy and the church choirs were there throughout the program.

The Master of Ceremony Ato Felasfaw Woldegabriel (President of the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago), guided the program with the utmost efficiency.



The following is the list of Guest Speakers

1. Dr, Tesfaye Tasew - On Colon Cancer
2. Dr. Eyob Feyssa - on Liver cancer , Hepatitis B&C
3. W/o Saba Kidane PA – on Breast cancer
4. Dr. Alawode Oladele - on Nutrition and vitamins
5. Aba G/Selasie - Cancer from the religion perspectives.
6. W/T Fifi Derso – (Founder) history of ABCF
7. Ato Zewdu Derso - special thanks
8. Youth Church Choirs from various churches
9. W/o Tsedale, Mimi, Mahilet, Joan and Ato Tesfa (Testimonial)
10. W/o Emebet Short personal story and Poem
11. W/o Lemlem Tsegaw closing remarks



The Medical Doctors and professionals shared their expertise with the audience on the subject matter assigned to them. In addition to the helpful information, the testimonials from the various cancer survivors were touching. It made the entire audience shed their tears. While I have attended so many Ethiopian meetings and conferences, I have never seen anything like the Alemtsehay Breast Cancer Foundation conference.



I have never witnessed Ethiopians continuously weeping during a meeting or while



someone was delivering a speech.

Men and women, elderly and young wept from the heart during the testimonies by Tsedale's, Mimi's, Mahlet's, Joan's, and Ato Tesfa's personal testimonies. The tearful testimonies of the speakers made the entire audience sad. They were recounting their ordeals when they were diagnosed, and how they fought the illness. More than half of the presenters were too young for cancer. on how they found out about this life threatening cancer, and on how they fought it. courageously – in their 20s and 30s.

It was unbelievable. The Liver cancer survivor's ordeal was also amazing and almost



miraculous.

The professionals and the doctors also gave helpful advices on what steps we must follow to prevent breast and liver cancers. Although we might not completely avoid prevent cancer in its every form and shape, they gave us hope that we can do certain things delay its onset or to fight and cure it altogether.

They said some cancers may be acquired as a predisposition through genetic, while others are the direct consequences of our diets and lifestyles. The earlier we take action the better off we become in dealing with it. The steps we should take in the case of cancer due to Hepatitis B and C were presented very clearly since Hepatitis is prevalent in our community. They taught us how to get tested for Hepatitis, and if positive, they share the steps we should take; and if negative, they recommended Hepatitis B vaccinations as a preventive measure for ourselves and our family. The food we eat and the way we eat were discussed in detail by the nutrition expert. The nutritionist knew our community very well, he knew our traditional and cultural dishes including the raw meat dishes Tirie Siga and Kitfo. This Doctor taught the audience on the need to eat right and the need for physical exercise in order to avoid the majority of chronic illnesses including cancer. The Physicians Assistance Mrs. Saba Kidane took time to show both the men and women how to examine ourselves for breast cancer every day. She showed us how a normal breast structure differs from one affected with cancer. She described the shape of a normal breast and abnormal breast. If abnormality is detected during physical self-examination, we must immediately contact our doctors.



One unusually pleasant presence is that of the Ethiopian Orthodox Priest Abba Gebre Sellasie, who spoke about the relationship between life with God and our physical health? He was unique voice in the group and very pleasant one at that. Most of the audience wanted the priest to keep on speaking, however, due to time limitation, he had to stop to give chance to other speakers who were waiting to speak after he. His half hour speech was easy to understand and was presented in a manner that made perfect sense for the audience. In short, the conference was a complete success from both the organizer's, the presenters, and the guests point of view.

We should thank the Board Members of the ABCF, and particularly our sister Fifi Derso for founding the Alemtsehay Breast Cancer Foundation (ABCF) and for holding the founding conference in Atlanta. I am proud of Fifi Derso for her concerns to our sisters and brothers both in Ethiopia and the Diaspora. Fifi thought of us and wanted everyone to hear hers and her late sister Alemtsehay's cause through this conference.

I truly felt that I heard Alemtsehay during the conference. I encourage all Ethiopians to listen to the expert presenters and all those who spoke at the ABCF conference.

Whether in the video or live format, it is worth listening it.



Abera Sisay,

Chicago