

In Ethiopia, defensive driving training paves the way to remote delivery

Ethiopia's Pharmaceutical Fund and Supply Agency (PFSA) is responsible for procuring and distributing all pharmaceutical products to more than 80 million Ethiopians. Such a large task is a sizeable challenge as the majority of the population lives in rural areas.

Ethiopia is working toward complete health care coverage, including the most remote and hard-to-reach areas. Achieving this goal requires more human and physical resources, and the Supply Chain Management System (SCMS), a project of PEPFAR administered by USAID, is supporting the government to ensure it has what it needs.

Getting pharmaceutical products to the patients that need them requires vehicles and trained drivers. Successful delivery requires that warehouses are well organized and staffed, so that trucks are loaded with the right quantity and type of products. To strengthen national distribution, SCMS has provided PFSA with transport vehicles, forklifts and staff training.

Yohannes Aklilu is a truck driver from Dire Dawa in eastern Ethiopia. A proud father, he is one of the beneficiaries of the Defensive Driving training, which SCMS offers to PFSA staff. This training for heavy vehicle drivers aims to upgrade driving skills, including loading, speed control, driving in hazardous conditions and being cautious in general. The three-day trainings begin with driving practice for trainees and conclude with a practical examination. Yohannes passed.



Yohannes Aklilu participated in the Defensive Driving training, provided by SCMS to Ethiopia's Pharmaceutical Fund and Supply Agency (PFSA) staff.

He was certified to drive the new 35-ton trucks. He describes the trainer as skilled and the training as being very good.

Yohannes works in Dire Dawa, delivering products from the Dire Dawa PFSA hub within an approximate 300 km radius to hospitals and health facilities in Harari, Oromia and Somali regions. He is an important link in the supply chain, as he helps ensure people have the medicine they need.

Yohannes has no problem driving on roads throughout the country. Applying the lessons from the Defensive Driving course, Yohannes says: "When the roads are not paved, I adjust the speed," as sometimes there is rain and the roads become muddy. He looks forward to the next training, where he hopes to become certified to drive 40-ton trucks.



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To date, SCMS has provided the Defensive Driving training to 65 PFSA staff. The process is part of the supportive role SCMS plays in building capacity at PFSA, ensuring that increased infrastructure and machinery are matched with improved human resources. Seventy-five vehicles and 10 forklifts have been provided, and 12 more forklifts are on the way. With accompanying staff training, PFSA now has a greater ability to ensure medicine reaches the people who need it.

Wakgari Bekele is another beneficiary of SCMS training. He works at the Nekemte warehouse, which receives product from the central warehouse and distributes it to public and private health facilities. In 2011 and 2012, Wakgari participated in an SCMS training on forklift use for PFSA and SCMS staff and was certified for forklift use after passing the post-training practical exam. This training included forklift operations and safety, to keep himself and his co-workers free from harm and ensure valuable medical commodities are not damaged.

Wakgari is the only person at the Nekemte hub who has been trained to use the forklift, a skill that will be put to use as the new warehouse is expected to be completed in the summer of 2013. Currently, most of the receiving, sorting and distribution duties are done manually. The risks related to inappropriate use of forklifts include damage to product,

damage to racking, damage to pallets and danger to staff if materials are stored incorrectly — not to mention the risks caused by improperly forklift operation. With financial support from PEPFAR through SCMS, the current warehouse is fully equipped with multi-level racking, which will be expanded in the new warehouse. Wakgari will ensure these processes are more organized, efficient and safe.

As the shift to the new, larger and fully equipped warehouse is expected to take place this year, the ongoing training offered to PFSA staff by SCMS will ensure a smooth transition. In addition, the Nekemte hub is in the process of acquiring a second forklift, and relies upon SCMS to continue to train staff on forklift handling for optimal warehouse operations.

The Nekemte hub is one of many regional hubs operated by PFSA. SCMS has provided physical supports, including forklifts, cold rooms and warehouse racking, in 10 warehouses across the country. To ensure that warehouses' physical space is best utilized, SCMS continues to offer capacity-building trainings. The Forklift Operations and Defensive Driving trainings are two such examples, represented by Yohannes and Wakgari, who work vigilantly to ensure medicines reach the people who need them.



Wakgari Bekele was certified for forklift use after passing SCMS's post-training practical exam.

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Agency for International Development or the United States government.

ABOUT SCMS

The Supply Chain Management System (SCMS) was established to collaborate within country and global partners to ensure a reliable, cost-effective and secure supply of high quality medicines and health products for HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment. SCMS is funded as part of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Visit us at www.scms.pfscm.org.

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