

August 2014

Dear Friends,

Orphaned at age 12, Isuku Isuku (nicknamed Socrate) has experienced some tough times in his short life in the far west of Congo. Compared to many other orphaned Congolese children, however, he was fortunate in that a local woman, Mama Micheline Kakene Kikar, had accepted to be a foster mother to him and two of his siblings. He was in Mama Micheline's home one day, having some food with her before she resumed her work of soap making. Socrate was thirsty and when he saw what he thought was a glass of clear water on the counter he grabbed the glass, took a big swallow and then began to scream as an unspeakably severe pain, like a fire burning him up from the inside, assailed him. Hearing his screams, Mama Micheline came to his aide, but there was nothing that she could do to reverse the situation. The damage was already done. Socrate had drunk some of the lye that Mama Micheline uses for making soap and it had caused a severe chemical burn of his esophagus – the tube that takes food from the mouth to the stomach.



Mama Micheline is a widow who struggles to make ends meet through her artisanal soap production and sales. She is also a strong Christian. She felt responsible for Socrate's injury because he had drunk the lye in her home and she was determined to do whatever she could to help him recover from this devastating injury. What followed were many visits to local health centers, to traditional healers and to local hospitals but no one was able to help Socrate. His

esophagus was so badly scarred he was unable to eat anything by mouth and while he was still just barely able to swallow his saliva, even that was getting more and more difficult. He was quickly losing weight and had no energy. Finally, Mama Micheline heard of the Vanga Baptist Hospital in a nearby region and she took Socrate there hoping they would be able to help. When he was first seen at Vanga, Socrate's esophagus had become totally blocked and his weight was down to 33 pounds. Through God's providence, one of the doctors at Vanga, Dr. Friedhelm Foster, had come to Tshikaji in Oct. 2013 to teach a course in ultrasound. While here, he learned that the staff at Good Shepherd Hospital is able to perform a trans-hiatal esophagectomy, the complex and specialized surgery that restores a patient's ability to eat following esophageal blockage. In phone consultations with physicians at the Good Shepherd

Hospital, a plan was developed in which Socrate would have an operation at Vanga to place a feeding tube into his stomach, to allow him to receive nutrition, and once he had substantially regained his strength and weight he would come to Good Shepherd Hospital for an operation that would enable him to eat again.

With many people praying for him, Socrate survived the first operation and quickly began to regain strength and weight. When he was declared strong enough to endure the trip to Tshikaji, he and Mama Micheline climbed on top of a truck heavily loaded with freight and set out on the 310-mile voyage to Good Shepherd Hospital. During the grueling, almost three weeklong trip, Socrate could not be properly fed and he lost a lot of the weight he had gained at Vanga. When they arrived at Good Shepherd Hospital Socrate weighed only 44 pounds. Over the next two months Mama Micheline fed Socrate special feedings of locally prepared high-protein, high-calorie liquefied meals through the tube in his stomach to get him back into condition for his surgery. Having spent all of her meager resources searching for help for Socrate, paying for his care at Vanga hospital, and then on the voyage from Vanga to Tshikaji, Mama Micheline was flat broke when she got to Tshikaji. But she knew God had not brought them that far to desert them and she had faith that he would provide – and she was right. Thanks to generous donors in the US who had given gifts for needy patients at Good Shepherd Hospital, the funds to cover Socrate's special food were available and he slowly grew strong enough to endure the major surgery he faced.

The surgery that he needed is, to our knowledge, not available anywhere else in the DR Congo. In order to restore his ability to eat, the tube (the esophagus) that connects his mouth to his stomach would have to be removed and his stomach moved up to replace it. This is a major surgery anywhere in the world, but it's all the more serious in a child and in the DR Congo. During his 6-hour surgery Socrate was held up in prayer by many in Tshikaji, in Kananga, in Vanga, elsewhere in Congo and around the world. We thank and praise the Lord that Socrate came through the surgery with flying colors. You should have seen the smile on his face the first time he was able to eat a bite of real food!

His recovery complete, Socrate and his foster mother have returned home grateful to God for Socrate's healing, grateful to Good Shepherd Hospital for the care he received and grateful to American Presbyterians whose generosity helps make Good



Shepherd's curative healing ministries possible.

We at the Christian Medical Institute thank God for the team that He has put together over the years at the Good Shepherd Hospital – nurses, anesthetists, x-ray technicians, doctors, lab techs and others whose privilege it is to offer medical care in God's name.

Thank you for your continued generous support of our service, allowing us to be part of what God is doing through medical care in the Congo and enabling us to minister to Socrate and many, many others like him.

Blessings in Christ,  
John and Gwenda Fletcher

John: [jfletcher1420@gmail.com](mailto:jfletcher1420@gmail.com)  
Gwenda: [gwenda.fletcher@gmail.com](mailto:gwenda.fletcher@gmail.com)