

March 2019

### **LEPRA TRUSTEE LAUNCHES THE NEW FACE OF LEPROSY**

Professor Lockwood, a leprologist, academic and trustee for global charity Lepra, Alex Kumar, doctor and photographer and Saba Lambert, a doctor working in Ethiopia have launched 'The New Face of Leprosy Project'. Funded by a social engagement grant from London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), the project is aimed at creating a positive image of leprosy and reducing the negative images currently associated with leprosy. It will also highlight that individuals are not defined by their disease and that it is in fact a treatable infection.

Over 4 million people are now living with life-changing disabilities as a result of leprosy. Lepra is working hard to combat the disability, break down the prejudice and reduce the suffering caused by leprosy. The charity finds, treats and rehabilitates people affected so they can rebuild their lives and live as valued members of their communities.

Thanks to the support, and much needed treatment, that Lepra provides, leprosy is curable for individuals and many people with leprosy will not develop severe disease if they access treatment early.

In the past, images of severely disabled patients are what most people have associated with leprosy. However, these images are not representative of the disease. This is why leprosy needs a new face and Lepra trustee, Professor Lockwood is determined to make this happen.

Professor Lockwood recently visited Gondar in Ethiopia to support leprosy patients by launching the project with the Minister for Labour and Social Affairs on World Leprosy Day.

As part of the project, Professor Lockwood and Saba Lambert have been working with a psychology student, taking photographs and talking to patients in Addis Ababa who have been treated at the main leprosy referral hospital (All Africa Leprosy Tuberculosis, Rehabilitation and Training – ALERT). Professor Lockwood was moved by the patients who talked of how initially, they had misconceptions, succumbed to rumours and even attempted suicide. Because of the negative connotations surrounding leprosy, many of these people had been abandoned by their family and friends and were left with mental ill health due to feelings of isolation, despondency and rejection. These feelings coupled with discrimination of leprosy make up the mental health burden of leprosy which at present is largely unexplored.



After undergoing treatment which has involved taking MDT, and if necessary, steroids, these patients have been able to not only survive, but thrive. The individuals are now living happy lives where they are able to work, be financially independent and have a family. These are the individuals who Lepra, Professor Lockwood, Saba and Alex are raising awareness of. These are the new faces of leprosy.

Professor Lockwood, Lepra Trustee, comments: "It is an honour to be a part of this project alongside Lepra and to be raising awareness of such an important cause. During my time in Addis Ababa I spent time talking to those who have been treated for leprosy and have lived through the stigmatisation. They have come out the other side of this and the shared message to new patients was that of hope. This project is a unique, patient-centred and positive way to document leprosy and I look forward to expanding this project to other countries and allow new patients to access these stories of hope."

**-ENDS-**

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## **Notes to Editors**

### **About Lepra**

Lepra is a UK-based international specialist charity that has been working to beat leprosy since 1924. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II became Patron of Lepra in 1952, shortly after the death of her father King George VI, who had been Lepra's Patron since the charity was founded in 1924.

Leprosy affects over 7 million of the most vulnerable people in the world, causing life-changing disabilities and attracting terrible prejudice and discrimination. **But there is a cure.**

Lepra works to beat leprosy in India, Bangladesh and Mozambique by finding, diagnosing and treating people affected by the disease. By raising awareness, pushing for early detection and supporting people living with disabilities caused by leprosy, Lepra works towards a day when this disease no longer destroys lives.



Last year, the charity reached 301,000 people through diagnosis, treatment and care. It reached a further 1.7 million people through health education and events to raise awareness of leprosy and other neglected diseases.

Find out more about Lepra on its website and social media channels:

Website: [lepra.org.uk](https://lepra.org.uk)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LEPRAUK/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/LepraUK>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/LEPRAHinA>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/LepraUK/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/lepra/>