

# A Podiatric Challenge...One Foot at a Time

**D**r. Kenneth Leavitt, Chief of Podiatry at NEBH, rarely backs down from a challenge. And Eugert Kaziu certainly presented him with one.

Eugert, known as Gerti to friends and family, was born in Albania with severely turned feet, a condition that has steadily worsened as he has gotten older. By the time he was 18, his feet turned so badly that he had difficulty walking or even standing straight. His family knew that the problem would likely get much worse as he grew but their access to a foot surgeon trained to perform the kind of surgeries that Gerti would need was severely limited in Albania. In addition, the boy's case had other complications because Gerti has mild autism as well as several other medical issues, some of them neurological.

In the summer of 2009, Gerti's sister, Jetmira, an Albanian émigré living with her husband in Boston, approached Dr. Leavitt and asked if he would be willing to assemble a team to help her brother. Intrigued, Dr. Leavitt went to Albania in September to assess the situation and meet Gerti. Because of the complexity of the operation, it was determined that he would perform the surgeries on the first foot in the United States at NEBH and then travel to Albania in May 2010, if things went well, to follow up and operate on the second foot. During his visit, he wanted to ensure both that the patient was medically stable and that the operating conditions would be sufficient to perform the second operation.

While in Albania, he met with Edvin Selmani, MD, an Albanian physician pursuing his foot fellow-ship. The two agreed that Dr. Selmani

would fly to Massachusetts to observe the first surgery, then, when Dr. Leavitt went to Albania in May to operate on the other foot, Dr. Selmani would be his assistant, organizer and part of the translation team.

So, in November, Gerti and his family finally arrived in Massachusetts for the first surgery. The team assembled by Dr. Leavitt included Dr. Selmani, Dr. Brian Zinsmeister,

Gerti's left foot had been straightened. From there, the boy experienced three months of intense physical therapy to teach him how to walk again, before he was able to return to Albania this month.

In May, Dr. Leavitt plans to return to Albania to the University Hospital "Mother Theresa" in Tirana, Albania to operate on Gerti's other foot and to help them expand their Department of Orthopedics.

In the meantime, Jetmira has mounted a publicity campaign and started a foundation to help fund more care for disabled patients like her brother and to bring talented surgeons like Dr. Leavitt to Albania to teach local surgeons the advanced techniques needed to care for them. "It is the hope of my mum and dad, and me and my husband, that my brother's situation can be used to help not only the care of his other foot, but other children in Albania." Jetmira also notes that she is grateful to all of Gerti's caregivers at NEBH.

Following the surgery, she sent a letter to one of the nurses at NEBH, stating,

"I want to thank you again for the love that you personally and that others at the Hospital have shown to my brother and our family." ■



Clockwise from top left: Gerti required seven pins in his foot to straighten it out; Dr. Leavitt with Gerti; pre-op, Gerti's left foot was severely turned; post-op, the foot has been straightened.

NEBH staff podiatrist and Dr. Bob Bode from Anesthesia, all of whom had graciously donated their time to Gerti's case. Four hours, multiple incisions and seven screws later,

**For those wishing to donate funds and equipment** to the orthopedic division of the Hospital where Dr. Leavitt will be operating this coming May, tax deductible donations can be made care of "Gerti" at:

The Massachusetts Albanian American Society  
160 Commonwealth Avenue, #419  
Boston, MA 02116

Or on the web at <http://www.maasbesa.org> or <http://maasbesa.org/donate.php>

MAAS/BESA is an independent, not-for-profit organization under section 501(c)3 of the IRS tax code.