



COURTESY RACHEL REGINA

Gugu Mofokeng (center) with former coworkers holding “No Gugu, No Work!” signs.

SIGHT FOR SORE EYES

Thirty-eight-year-old Gugu Mofokeng has dedicated her life’s work to others, and people seem inclined to dedicate themselves to her in return. “No Gugu, No Work!” was her coworkers’ rallying cry on her last day at WhizzKids United, a South African clinic and youth center that uses soccer as an educational tool. They dreaded losing their teammate.

In 2012, Mofokeng started losing sight in her left eye because of epithelial downgrowth, a condition in which certain eye cells grow out of control, causing great pressure and pain. After several unsuccessful treatments, Mofokeng’s vision deteriorated to the point at which she could only distinguish light from dark.

The Class of 2017’s Zachary Dong heard about Mofokeng’s condition from his aunt, Krista Dong, an MD and a colleague of Mofokeng’s. He coordinated a team that included Deepinder Dhaliwal, an MD and professor of ophthalmology; Scott Drexler, an OD and assistant professor of ophthalmology; and Joel Schuman, an MD and former chair of ophthalmology. Together, they managed Mofokeng’s epithelial downgrowth, fitted her for special contact lenses and glasses, and treated her frequent headaches. More than 100 people pitched in funds and other resources (including *gratis* care and attention from UPMC staff) to make Mofokeng’s trip possible.

Mofokeng returned home with pain-free vision. “Coming back, I noticed and appreciated the different shades of green in the hills and trees in my town,” she notes. Mofokeng now works for a program helping young people with HIV and tuberculosis.

“I may never get a chance to show kindness to the people who showed me kindness, [but] I have made it my business to show kindness all around me,” she says. —Ali Greenholt