



# Hamlin Fistula UK

The Only UK Charity Exclusively Supporting the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia

UK Registered Charity number 257741



## Right Livelihood Award - widely known as the Alternative Nobel Prize

Dr Hamlin was not able to travel to Stockholm to receive this prestigious award, so she was represented by Annette Bennett (Midwifery College) and Matron Ejigayehu. The following citation is, however, Dr Hamlin's.

*"If there are three burdens in life that we seek to avoid, it is pain, physical discomfort and social exclusion. Obstetric fistula is a life-long condition that produces all three in the same individual and in millions of women worldwide.*

*If the Right Livelihood Award is an award for personal courage and social transformation, perhaps it should be awarded to each woman in Ethiopia or elsewhere who resolves to make a long journey to a remote and unfamiliar hospital where her courage is further tested by medical operations on parts of her body normally private. Medical success is always a wonderful reward for a doctor, but the social transformation resulting from a woman's personal struggle is an award that only she has earned".*



Matron Ejigayehu receives the Right Livelihood Award on behalf of Dr Hamlin

## Midwifery College

The Ministry of Health has made our College the model for the country of Ethiopia as a midwifery training centre and members of other colleges have been to inspect the way we work. All of them are impressed with our teaching methods, our library and various buildings. The college has won a high level of respect in the country for the standards of excellence that have been implemented.

All of this is a dream come true for Dr Hamlin, for her initial intention of coming to Ethiopia 50 years ago was to train midwives.

Annette Bennett has handed over the role of Dean of the College to Jacqueline Bernhard, this took effect from the beginning of February. Jacqueline has significant experience in clinical and academic work in both European and African settings.



**Student Midwives**

Annette will continue as Vice Dean at the college and will have major responsibilities in the area of clinical work and preparing for the deployment of the first of the Midwifery Graduates into the countryside later in the year.

We recognise the enormous contribution that Annette and her team (and Beverley, one of our UK trustees) have made in getting the college started and now setting such a high standard that the college has.

### **News from Dr Hamlin**

“I want to thank all of you who are our faithful supporters. You have read earlier news of our Midwifery College. Our only male midwife, Solomon Abebe is soon to be in charge of the deployment of our graduate midwives into the countryside. He is especially fitted for such a task with his previous experience of visiting health centres in the country.

Our midwives belong to us and we shall be responsible for them once they are out on their own. We need to nurture them and visit them regularly as they face a new and big challenge - from high school student to a midwifery student, to the countryside where they spent their childhood and school days, to now be responsible for the birth of babies and the care and welfare of mothers. This is one of the most important tasks in the world. We believe our students have been well trained and prepared for this task, and taught what my late husband was always emphasising and teaching, “A mother is a family’s richest possession, a being of priceless worth.”

We now have a great team of dedicated midwives as tutors and I believe we can do much to reduce the enormous maternal death rate in the countryside and the prevalence of stillborn babies and fistula injuries—‘a living death’ for so many young women!”

### **Kassa’s Story**

Kassa (*not her real name*) arrived at our hospital in Addis Ababa with her father. Dr Hamlin asked them how they had made the long journey all the way from Lalibela, in Northern Wollo. Kassa’s father said he had sold his only ploughing ox to raise enough money for the journey, he didn’t mind because he said he wanted his daughter to be cured. Kassa had severe injuries and fortunately she was cured but will probably never be able to be married or to have a child again.

At the time that Kassa and her father were at the hospital, some bird watchers came to visit while they were in Addis Ababa and Dr Hamlin told them Kassa’s story. These visitors collected between them enough money to buy the father two more ploughing oxen. How generous people are!



**Ethiopian farmer ploughing with oxen**

*(Photo by courtesy of Abraham's Oasis)*

### **Emawa's Story**

Emawa (*not her real name*) is a patient in our hospital for the third time. She lives in the northern part of the country in a very remote village without infrastructure. With her first pregnancy she had been in labour for four days before delivering a stillborn baby and suffering fistula damage. Emawa said, "I have a good husband who didn't desert me and who encouraged me not to feel ashamed of myself while he was searching for help for my injury." He took her to the nearest health clinic for treatment, but was told to take her to the AA Fistula Hospital where she would have the medical care she needed. This news was hard for them because they had no money for bus fares. Emawa said, "He sold our only property, an ox, to bring me here." Such an action is so hard for a farmer as their only source of income is using the ox to plough the small area of land they have. She has just delivered a baby girl, her second baby since having a fistula repair, she also has a boy of 4 years. She is very grateful and happy and her husband calls in frequently to make sure she is alright. Emawa is now anxious to go home and rejoice with her family.

### **Medical News**

A major part of our activity is related to research and training for the benefit of fistula patients worldwide. Four of our doctors and a health officer attended an annual meeting of the International Society of Fistula Surgeons in Nairobi.

The training of doctors and nurses in fistula care is at present taking place in our hospitals in Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar and Yirgalem.

In our main hospital and the outreach centres 606 procedures have taken place in the last three months. Several of our staff have upgraded their educational level, thus enabling them to give better treatment and care to our patients. Four have completed their BSc in nursing. They are Sisters Konjit, Genet, Lidia and Bethlehem. We send our congratulations to them.

### **News from Bahir Dar Hamlin Fistula Centre**

We now have another doctor on the staff, Dr Bitew, he worked here whilst Dr Andrew Browning was away on leave in Australia and he is fitting in well. Dr Bitew is also able to offer cover to other centres and he

recently went to our Centre in Harar to operate on patients there who would otherwise have had to wait much longer.



**Mulunesh with her triplets**

Dr Andrew reports, “We recently had a lovely woman come to us, Mulunesh, who had delivered triplets in her village. Miraculously all survived although Mulunesh suffered awful injuries. When the triplets came they were 7 months old, but all much smaller than our own baby Christopher, who was 3 months old at the time. She was trying to breast feed all three even though she was quite ill and malnourished. Two of the children had severe malaria and all were poorly. We were very blessed in that all children did well and began to put on weight and were given Christopher’s old clothes. Mulunesh was also cured so we sent them away all much improved and with baby formula and clothes.

Unfortunately they didn’t do well at home and they returned to us quite ill and thin again. They came to a nearby orphanage run by some fellow Australian Christians. They are all doing well again and are being sponsored by friends of ours back in Australia, who also had twins—but were delivered by Caesarean in a good hospital.”

### **Desta Mender—Joy Village**

Desta Mender is a farm village set in 60 acres of land about 14 miles from the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. This beautiful little piece of heaven on earth called ‘Joy Village’ is a place where girls live whose injuries are so severe they can’t be cured. It is a small community where they can live free from ridicule and rejection.

Although surgery didn’t cure them, by living here they can begin to restore their self-worth and have their life back again. They can work on the farm learning about market gardening, dairying, poultry keeping and egg production. They can learn how to bake, cook, sew and eventually be able to sell their crafts and embroideries and earn a wage for themselves. There are facilities in place for them to attend school to improve their education. These young women now have a greater confidence and a much brighter outlook on their future.



**Desta Mender—Joy Village**

It is possible for some of the women to leave Desta Mender and live within reach of one of our Outreach Centres. They can be closer to their families and speak their own language and still receive the medical care that they need.

### **Juniper Café and Conference Centre**

The development of the outdoor Juniper Café at Desta Mender is becoming quite a success. Additional catering training has been given to 11 women and it is hoped that with the extra knowledge they have acquired the women will be able to prepare a buffet lunch service for people who come for conferences. Brochures and flyers have been distributed to publicise the Café and Conference Centre for potential customers needing out-of-town dining, or for conducting meetings and conferences. The number of people coming is quite encouraging and because of the extra work, the women have started to earn a good income. The feedback is that the location and service provided are both very good.

### **Clinical Attachments**

All students from the Hamlin College of Midwives spend 3 months on clinical attachments to enable them to gain practical experience, usually between June and August each year. The students are divided into two groups, between a rural health centre and Attat Hospital, changing groups half-way through. Two tutors from the college are with both groups.



**Students departing from Hamlin College to Attat with Barbara Kwast (left) and Sr Giday (in uniform)**

The students live in a modest hostel in the village. The first year students do only day duty in the antenatal clinic and the labour ward and the second years are also on night duty.



**Students Hostel in Attat**

Barbara Kwast, a midwifery tutor from the Netherlands, helps as a volunteer and has been doing this every summer since 2008. She stays for the whole period of time in Attat Hospital. Attat Hospital is in a rural village, literally at the end of a road and is 165 km south-west of Addis Ababa.

Barbara will again this year, during June and July, devote her time and love to the second year students in Attat. She is looking forward to this rewarding experience with the pregnant women, the students and the staff at Attat Hospital. *(More news in next issue)*

## **Physiotherapy**

Nerve damage during obstructed labour can result in a condition known as 'dropped foot'. Some women have contractures of tendons and muscles in their legs and hips due to long periods of lying down in one position hoping they will heal and become dry again. It may take more than six months of physiotherapy before the patients can regain the use of their legs and be ready for surgery.



**Patients working hard with Physiotherapy**

When surgery is over, cured patients returning home are an important means of educating rural women about fistula prevention.

Most of the women who come for treatment have suffered greatly in many ways. They have no baby to hold, the husband has probably gone away and many will have been isolated from family life. These women need specialist psychological counselling. We have a specially trained nurse who assesses the needs of each patient and ensures that all their issues are recognised and dealt with.

Over the years about 30,000 patients have been cured. They return home and are like ambassadors all over the countryside, more people are aware of this problem. The health centres lecture about it, the hospitals know about it so more people now know that a cure is possible.

Those who go on to bear more children sometimes come back to us while waiting to be delivered. There is a special ward where they wait until we send them to another hospital to have a caesarean section and they come back to convalesce after about five days. They walk about and get strong before we send them back to their village.

### Metu Outreach Centre



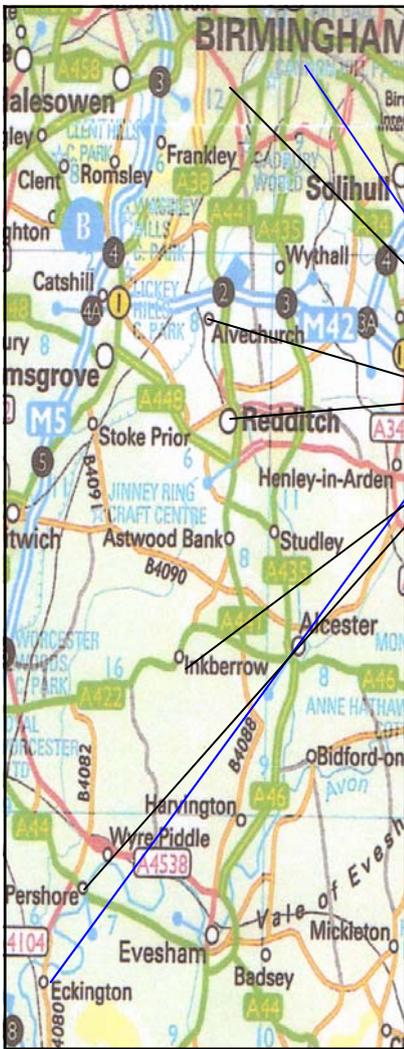
As you can see here, our new Centre at Metu is nearing completion and will soon be accepting patients.

### UK News :

#### **Barefoot Walk for Charity : June 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th 2010**

After watching the documentary film, "A Walk to Beautiful" Kalantha Brewis was so moved by the plight of the fistula patients that she decided to **walk 35 miles** barefoot from **Eckington** to the **Women's Hospital in Birmingham** to help raise awareness of the young women who have suffered horrendous childbirth injuries. Kalantha said that to show how appreciative she is of the wonderful midwifery care our women in the UK receive, thus preventing these injuries, she is embarking on this **barefoot walk** hoping to raise funds to enable more women in Ethiopia to be treated.





Places she will be calling at en route :

Eckington – where the walk begins

Pershore

Inkberrow

Redditch

Alvechurch

Kings Norton -before finally reaching the

Birmingham Women's Hospital,  
a fitting end for the walk.

You can give a donation to support Kalantha by sending a cheque to **Hamlin Fistula UK** or donate through **Just Giving**, their website is [www.justgiving.com/walkingbarefoot](http://www.justgiving.com/walkingbarefoot)

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