



Hamlin Fistula UK

UK Registered Charity number 257741

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



(Patients names in stories are changed to protect their identities)

Award for Dr Hamlin

Addis Ababa University has awarded an honorary Doctorate to Dr Hamlin for her long years of service in health care to the people of Ethiopia. She was awarded “Doctor of Medical Sciences honoris causa” and this is the first time that such an award has been given by the Addis Ababa University. The President of the University spoke at length about the contribution that Dr Hamlin has made to the country. He quoted words written by Dr Reginald Hamlin in which he described the plight of the fistula women, and of their desperate condition.

“Mourning the still birth of often her only child, incontinent of urine, ashamed of her offensiveness, abandoned by her husband and shunned by friends and her village society, homeless, unemployable, they endure, they exist without friends and without hope. They bear their sorrow in silent shame and each one calls forth the utmost compassion the human heart is capable of feeling—to meet only one is to be profoundly moved”.

The heartbreaking agony of these young women is vividly captured in the quoted memorable words of Dr Reginald Hamlin.



Dr Hamlin

Dr Hamlin responded by speaking to the assembly and her address was televised to the whole country of Ethiopia.

Dr Hamlin spoke of the terrible hardships that women have suffered in rural areas, the work of the hospital to reach out to them and the initiative in midwifery to prevent this terrible problem. She praised the staff of the hospital as her co-workers and colleagues and

she thanked God for His support of this work. The President of the University indicated that he would like to be in attendance at the first Graduation of Midwives in October.

Patient's Story

We have patients from every part of Ethiopia and some arrive with other health problems as well as obstetric fistula. Such instances are not new to our work, but this patient is different, she had both internal and external injuries. She had a fistula and a cleft lip. Her name is Chuchu and she is about 30 years old. She came to us from the western part of the country called Gidami, almost as far as the Sudan border.

She had faced obstructed labour lasting more than 2 days during the birth of her baby three years ago and her baby was stillborn. Her husband divorced her when he discovered her incontinence and she was shunned by all who knew her, until missionaries found her and brought her to our hospital. Dr Hamlin operated on her and her surgery was a success. When she was ready for discharge, we made contact with a "Cure Hospital" in Addis Ababa.



Chuchu before and after her surgery

A kind plastic surgeon operated on her lip free of charge, even though it is a private hospital. (Dr Hamlin knew him from church and all this was arranged after a Sunday morning service!) Now after two surgical procedures, one internal and one external, Chuchu has been transformed. She stayed with us until her lip was healed, we gave her a mirror so she could see her face and we often saw her gazing into it and smiling for the first time. We discharged her home, with mirror in hand and she said, "I am so grateful that I am now a good looking woman". We wish her success with her new start in life.

Travel Difficulties for Patients

Ethiopia has a rainy season which usually starts towards the end of May and goes through to the end of September or early October. Seasonal variations in weather affect the number of patients able to travel to our hospitals as the rains often make the dirt roads impassable. Planting and harvesting is also a busy time when women find it difficult to travel as there is usually no one available to help them make the long arduous journey to the nearest fistula centre or to Addis Ababa.



Happy to share a bed

The rains sometimes seem to go on for ever and merge into the harvesting season, this may explain why our hospitals are often relatively quiet during the last three months of the year. However, the early months of each year are our busiest times, particularly February and March, with patients often having to share a bed.

Desta Mender.

The Hope Association group of 10 members formed earlier this year at Desta Mender is proving to be successful. The objective is to develop productivity, self-esteem and saving ability, they have saved an average of 2500 birr per person within the first few months. For most of the women, this is their first saving. The plan is that as their savings increase, so will their potential and confidence to take a step to begin their own small business enterprise individually, or with their collective effort, in areas they choose. The new training curriculum and the efforts to make each small enterprise profitable are now bringing good outcomes for the women at Desta Mender. We congratulate the efforts of the staff there and thank our Dutch friends for funding the training of the women.

Students at Attat Hospital

The hospital is 165 km southwest of Addis Ababa. It is a Roman Catholic hospital with an excellent Public Health Department. Mothers bring their babies and the students learn how to give immunizations for BCG, DPT and Polio.

Women's groups have been set up in nearby villages where they learn about hygiene, nutrition, health and disease. The students have field trips to the villages and all this is proving to be very enjoyable and worthwhile.



Students learning immunisation



Mothers with babies queuing for immunization

Beredu's Story

Beredu was 14 when she married and had to leave school. She and her husband live in a village about 80km from Addis Ababa and her home is an hour's walk from the road. She had her first baby when she was 16 and labour lasted for 3 days. She cannot remember what happened during the birth because she fainted but she was told that her baby was stillborn—she never saw it.



Beredu after her surgery

Beredu developed a fistula and her uncle, who is working in Addis Ababa, took her to the Fistula Hospital three months after giving birth. She was in good condition, was operated on within 2 weeks of arriving at the hospital and was allowed home 3 weeks later after successful surgery.



Beredu at home with Dr Barbara and Sr Ruth

Sister Ruth and Professor Barbara Kwast accompanied Beredu home. It was a happy reunion with the family at her uncle's house in the countryside and they were treated to Ethiopian coffee. At the time of their arrival home, Beredu's husband was ploughing the field in the village where they lived, so unfortunately he was not present as they could not tell him early enough of their arrival. When Barbara next goes with the midwifery students to Attat she hopes to walk the one hour to Beredu's village to visit her. It would be wonderful to know whether she has become pregnant again.

A Joyful Place

At our Addis Ababa hospital we have a special 10 bed ward for any pregnant women who come back to us after previously having had their fistulas cured. Bethlehem Ward is part of a 30 bed building and it is a beautiful sunny place, opening onto a paved area at one end where the young women can sit and knit or gossip as they wait for their labour to begin.



Bethlehem Ward—A Joyful Place

They are sent to another hospital for a Caesarean section and then come back to us with a live baby, where they convalesce and learn how to care for their baby until they are strong enough to make the (often) long bus journey home. It really is a joyful place to visit in our hospital grounds. Occasionally we have to do a Caesarean section if it is urgent and on rare occasions we deliver a baby normally, often in the outpatients department!

Committed Staff

The staff here are committed and capable, taking on much responsibility. Often a nurse or post-graduate student will give a weekly short presentation on some recent relevant topic or research they may have done. It is exciting seeing them becoming confident in delivering a paper and really taking pride in the Hospital and its work.

Bahir Dar Outreach Centre

Dr Browning reports: “Sister Abaynesh has been our theatre sister since the beginning of our unit here in Bahir Dar. She is always cheerful, hard working and has great abilities. She sometimes pushes patients through theatre so quickly that I cannot keep up.

She has been studying hard at night and has recently upgraded to a Bachelor of Nursing. Over the years she has been gaining more skills, she now does all of our anaesthetics.



Sr Abaynesh giving spinal anaesthesia

She assists at the most difficult operations and has operated and cured 150 patients herself. On top of this she can run the Outpatients Department, Ward, and she helps with administration. Abaynesh is a great asset to our unit”.

Special Event

Chaltu is 26 years old. Eleven years ago she was a patient of Dr Hamlin’s in our hospital and after successful surgery she went home cured. In 2006 she came back to us and was delivered of a baby girl. Now, 4 years later and on her 3rd visit to our hospital, she came

back to us to express her heartfelt appreciation for the treatment she had previously received with love and kindness. Her visit was to present a gift to the hospital. It had taken her 4 months to make the traditional baskets and she had saved for a whole year to buy the materials.



A former patient with her gift

“Thank you” from Dr Hamlin

“I give my deep gratitude to you all for your interest and loyalty to this cause, which should be on all our hearts and one which can eventually be prevented. This is our longing, as we pray to our God who has been so gracious to us in the past and we trust will continue to guide into the future. I send you all my greetings and love”.

UK News

My Barefoot Walk - Kalantha Brewis

As I awoke on June 9th 2010 I felt sick, not illness, but anxiety. I had promised to walk barefoot to Birmingham, people had sponsored me to do it to the tune of over £10,000. I'd been on the radio and in the papers, I'd trained quite a lot, but now I actually had to do it and I felt incredibly nervous. All I had to do was to walk 35 miles and women in Ethiopia often walk 4 or 5 times that distance to get to the Hamlin Hospitals. I felt apprehensive, so I had to focus on those young women. I put on my hideous (but highly visible) yellow Kaftan and headed off to church where I had a warm send off from friends and neighbours.

My nerves were misplaced. I had wonderful support all the way, not least from the Charity's trustees who were always on hand to help out.

Friends from my village and my church and from other churches too, came to walk alongside me and, remarkably, my feet held up really well - quite a lot of aching but just a couple of tiny blisters and a rather sore ankle on the last day.



Kalantha leaving Alvechurch

I was never alone, except for the first few miles on the 3rd day. I was stopped by a squad car and asked by the two officers inside “whether I had any problems they could help me with”! My appearance as a barefoot woman dressed head to foot in banana yellow had obviously caused them some concern and they felt I might need returning to some local facility!

Particular highlights were lunch at Inkberrow First School, where the children’s uniform is yellow, so I fitted right in! I ate with them and we talked about how much they liked their shoes, and whether I was going to get my feet wet if it rained. Another special moment was just as I arrived at the Women’s Hospital. A driver appeared, running out from his bus, donation in hand, to say he’d been listening to me on the radio all week and had hoped he would be seeing me.



Collecting donations

In fact, for me, the walking was something of a luxury. I had the privilege of raising money

for this most worthy of causes.

As I spoke evening by evening, I got tired, but I tried to keep what I was saying fresh and in every place I was met with enthusiasm and generosity.

I am now more determined to bring the problem of fistula to wider attention and to do what I can to remove one woman at a time from the humiliation and isolation of this awful condition. I have been amazed by people's generosity in this very difficult economic environment.

Once Gift Aid has been reclaimed, I think I will have raised in the region of £15,000. If you are one of the people who sponsored me, THANK YOU.

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