



Hamlin Fistula UK

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

Newsletter October 2012

UK Registered

Charity no.
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(Patients names are changed to protect their identity)

Message from Dr Hamlin

I continue to operate on a variety of cases on my weekly days in theatre, usually Thursdays. It is good to see new patients admitted to our Addis hospital where we have 109 of 120 beds occupied. There are more patients being admitted from 'waiting beds' at Desta Mender, our farm village on the outskirts of the city where our long term patients live and work.

One of my long standing Australian friends, Valerie Browning, visited me recently. She has for many years worked hard to provide medical services for the Afar people in north east Ethiopia. She brought three Afar patients to us for fistula surgery.

I have visited our Mekelle Hamlin Fistula Centre which is located about 770km north of Addis Ababa. There I met Dr Melaku and his staff. I also visited some of our midwifery posts about 70km from Mekelle; it was rewarding to see the growth in the number of deliveries, proving that the local population is gaining confidence in the care and skill of our midwives.



Patients at Mekelle Fistula Centre

The good will and good reputation we have long enjoyed from overseas friends continues with the Federation of International Gynaecologists and Obstetricians (FIGO) paying us a visit a few weeks ago. They intend to use us as a benchmark site for their newly developed clinically oriented training program. We also now benefit from the help and services of two fairly new experienced urologists: one from Hungary and one from Germany, the latter coming to us at his own expense to help with operations needing urosurgery as well as fistula repair skills.

With my best wishes, Catherine Hamlin.

Hamlin College of Midwives Report from the College

We believe that Research is one of the most basic devices that lead to development. Research is responsible for the broadening and deepening of knowledge and the link between research and health in higher education is inseparable and complex, but very important. In the light of this, Hamlin College of Midwives is committed to maintaining professional development through research.



A team of experts from Higher Education Quality and Relevance Agency (HEQRA) has visited the college to investigate and evaluate our activities. The team reviewed the quality of our teaching in comparison with the Ethiopian higher education system and assessed where the college stands in relation to other midwifery schools in Ethiopia.

The Midwifery College is of course our flagship for prevention of these tragic fistula injuries and we are excited by what we hear from the already deployed graduate midwives in the provinces. It is a wonderful achievement to see and I am in awe of the good work being done. Be assured that our College is the hope for the future and already bringing care and comfort to women in childbirth in the country.

A Midwife's Story

Sr. Abrehat Assefa is one of our first graduate midwives and she was deployed to Baheretseba Health Centre, 75 km from Mekelle in the northern part of Ethiopia. This is her story:



One day a pregnant woman came to the health centre where I am working for her routine antenatal care. This was her third visit and she makes the long three hour journey from her village on foot. As she was near to term, I was counselling her regarding preparation for the birth and I explained the necessity for her to deliver by Caesarean section in Mekelle Fistula Hospital as she may encounter complications. I prepared her referral paper and told her to stay for one hour until the ambulance came to take her to the hospital.

I departed for a community visit of a postnatal mother and on my return to the health centre, the woman was not there. I knew the woman had friends here and I looked for her for four hours, knocking on every door in the district. I was concerned because I am the person who knows the woman's condition and it is my responsibility to save the lives of the woman and her baby.

I was tired, but decided that I must go to her village. On my way I found her at a friend's house 20 minutes on foot away from our health centre. I asked her why she left the centre and she told me that she went there to drink coffee with her friend.

I eventually sent her to hospital and after a week she was delivered of a healthy baby boy. I will always remember her!

Midwifery Statistics in Ethiopia

There are less than 2000 midwives working in Ethiopia which allows for a childbearing population ratio of 1:13,480. The World Health Organisation recommends a ratio of 1:5,000.

There are 131 hospitals in Ethiopia. Most of the hospitals are in cities and far from the rural population. Our fistula patients report that, on average, the nearest health facility is two days walk away from their homes. Only 12.4% receive any form of care from a skilled childbirth attendant.

News from our Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital

Our patients are offered literacy and numeracy classes and for some, this is their first opportunity to have any schooling. They speak Amharic but have never before seen it written down. The women repeat the letters and sounds back to their teacher and this provides a sing-song rhythm they could walk to through the hospital grounds.



Patients being taught outside in the warm sunshine

Twins times Two

You would be excited and pleased to see two women lying in our maternity ward, a ten-bed ward we keep for previous patients who come back to us pregnant after having had a fistula repair operation. We instruct all patients going home to get to the nearest country hospital to deliver again if they get pregnant. Two of these came back here, both expecting twins and were safely delivered, each with a boy and a girl!

Gete was a patient three years ago, her labour went on for three days and resulted in a stillbirth and fistula injuries. Her repair went well and she returned to us for her elective Caesarean section. Gete keeps saying, “I am blessed” and she cannot take her eyes away from her babies.



Our two mothers with their twins

The second mother is Abaynesh. She was a patient here in 2005 and went home cured. Abaynesh, like Gete, followed the advice given to her after her successful repair, came back to us for her delivery which also resulted in twins. The two mothers are now lying in the ward with two lovely babies in cots beside each bed. It is uncommon, but lovely to hear babies crying and this maternity ward is one of the happiest places in the hospital. Their happiness is great and ours is too.

Desta Mender

Desta Mender is our farm village which is now bringing hope to many women. The manager here is a young woman with much business experience. She is ideal to look after our permanent residents there and others who wish to move out and use the training they have received to set up a small business, perhaps sewing or running a café. (Four already run a café 4km from our site) Some run a dairy that was originally financed by our Dutch Trust.

We have inspiring news for you regarding one of our ladies named Mulunesh. She was treated in our hospital five years ago and then spent some years in Desta Mender receiving training to eventually work in the Hamlin College of Midwives kitchen. She has married Ato Mituku and their wedding was arranged by some of their dear friends and staff at Desta Mender. We send our congratulations and best wishes to them.

A Patient's Story

Zinabua, aged 35, had already delivered four babies safely at home, but with this fifth baby she was in labour for more than a day. Her husband took her to the nearest hospital to her village, Adwa hospital.



Zenabua

Here she delivered a stillborn baby and developed an obstetric fistula. From Adwa hospital she was referred to our satellite hospital in Mekelle where she was treated and subsequently referred to our hospital here in Addis Ababa. Her operation has been successful and she is now waiting and looking forward to being with her family again. Zenabua said, "I have no words, I just thank God for Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia." We wish her well as she prepares to go back to her village.

The Story of Hiwot

Sixty km. from Bahir Dar in Amhara region is one of our deployment sites called Brakat where two of our Hamlin Midwives are working. The area is difficult to access in the wet season, as often roads are impassable because of flooding. We would like you to meet Hiwot who is two years old. She has been assigned to help save the lives of mothers and newborn babies in this area and she works in all seasons for 24 hours each day. Sister Hirut is a midwife supervisor in this area and she says that often our midwives need to refer pregnant women to hospital in Bahir Dar, irrespective of the weather conditions, so Hiwot is called upon for help. She is our ambulance vehicle and was given this name by the local community due to her service to pregnant women. Hiwot is an Amharic word meaning 'Life' and she deserves this name because she has proved to be a 'Life Saver'.



Hiwot in Brakat

Olympic Games 2012

The last time the Olympic Games were held in London was in 1948 when Dr Hamlin was 24 years old. This photo was taken the same year.



The Games were again in London earlier this year and Dr Hamlin is now 88 years old.

A closing message from Dr Hamlin

I have hope and confidence in the future of our work, work for patients that need such tenderness and care from all who work here. Their suffering is ever before me and I know you too are concerned and are helping us to bring new life to a despairing one. Thank you for your help, concern and compassion.

Hamlin Fistula UK would like to thank you for your continued and unwavering support. Your efforts and generosity really make a difference in helping our dear patients. Without your money and support in different ways we would not be able to help so many women at the Hamlin Fistula hospitals in Ethiopia. For the women who do receive our help remember that it is you, our donors, who have given hope and opportunity to a better life, they would otherwise be in their humiliating condition for the rest of their lives. We can't reach all fistula sufferers but we are making a difference to so many each year. As you think of your giving this Christmas, please remember these women who are less fortunate than ourselves and who are dependent on our help.

Hamlin Fistula 2013 Calendar

We have calendars for sale at £8 each by post, £6 each if collected from our Office. Please send orders to our Office address as soon as possible as supplies are limited. Size: 24 page - A4 landscape. Each month includes a personal note from Dr Catherine Hamlin and features beautiful images shot at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and its regional centres.

Please refer to our website for all merchandise. (Click onto Book)