



**Hamlin Fistula UK**

Supporting the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia

Charity  
Number:  
1153053

**Newsletter October 2016**

**Happy Ethiopian New Year Dr Hamlin**

(Meskel Daisies Bloom at New Year : September 11th)



***(All patients' names are changed to protect their identity.)***

*. Photographs in this publication are by Joni Kabana and Mary Calvert unless otherwise stated.*

**We are one year closer to eradicating fistula in Ethiopia.**

The life-saving work at our Hamlin hospitals continues but there are still many women in Ethiopia who face the risk of obstructed labour resulting in childbirth injury or even death. These tragic outcomes are preventable with the assistance of qualified midwives. Through the Hamlin College of Midwives, we are working to ensure that all mothers in Ethiopia have the

care and resources they need for a safe birth. Our dedicated team of surgeons and nurses work tirelessly to treat and heal thousands of women suffering from fistula and other childbirth injuries. Meanwhile, our rigorously trained midwives are working hard to prevent these injuries before they happen.

Dr Hamlin says, "Our past graduates who are working in the countryside are making a difference. We are all so excited that we are now seeing fewer birth related injuries in hospital. We are making progress. We delight in the many stories of women being cured of fistula. Our midwives are positioned to help so many women safely deliver their babies in rural regions of Ethiopia this year - a huge step



toward preventing childbirth injuries and making obstetric fistula a rare occurrence in Ethiopia. This is tremendous progress. The women who are coming to us are poor. They can't

even afford a pair of shoes. They are important women, young women at the beginning of their lives. We have to help them. You're helping them to come here to the hospital to be cured. We still have a task to do. We're getting fewer women with fistulas now coming to the hospital, so we're doing other procedures that help women with incontinence in addition to fistula. This also is very important work. We thank you so much."

## Hamlin Midwives

There are 34 rural health centres staffed by Hamlin midwives. They have prevented hundreds of maternal and neonatal deaths and have saved many mothers from suffering the terrible and devastating childbirth injuries. Last year they delivered 13,734 babies, provided 60,786 family planning sessions and provided 18,498 mothers with antenatal and post-natal care. Every year hundreds of women die because they cannot access maternity care. For every death, another 20 women face serious birth injuries. The on-going training of our midwives ensures that, after graduation, more women receive the care they need to deliver their babies safely.

Two midwives, Mawerdi and Seada, who were interviewed in the health centre where they work, reported that since they have been working in that area the number of women delivering safely jumped from fifty to one thousand in a year. This is helping to eradicate fistula, reduce other childbirth injuries and save the lives of thousands of mothers and children in Ethiopia. They both shared in telling this story:

Mawerdi said, *“When I was a child I wanted to become a doctor. I have seen a lot of pregnant women get into difficulties and develop complications. When I finished my schooling I had the chance to study and become a midwife. I was happy”*.

Seada continues, *“When we compare the Hamlin College with other colleges, Hamlin is more competent. Even when we were first year students we were able to instruct third year students from a university. I was taught everything about midwifery, especially how to prevent fistula injuries and how to prevent complications. Everything we learned in theory we practiced in a hospital, so when I graduated I felt very competent”*.

Mawerdi: *Hamlin helps us by buying emergency drugs so we can respond to any complications and if we detect any problems the women are transferred to hospital. No mother should die while giving life. We are working here to help mothers and to help reduce maternal and child mortality”*.

After graduating, midwives return to their home villages to work in clinics in remote areas. As well as caring for pregnant women, they give family planning advice and talk to pupils in senior schools about the pitfalls of early marriage.

### Ato Zelalem Belete

The influence of the Hamlin Midwives working in many areas in Ethiopia is greatly helping to eradicate obstetric fistula and this is due to the hard work of the College staff. Ato Zelalem Belete is the much loved and respected Dean of the Hamlin College of Midwives. He joined Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia almost four years ago, in December 2012.



Zelalem says, “The College is important because it is dedicated to improving maternal and child health problems in the rural part of the country through highly skilled, compassionate, respectful and goal oriented midwives. Our work in the eradication of obstetric fistula in Ethiopia greatly excites me. Seeing the College’s influence in the improvement of maternal and child healthcare services in the rural community also excites me”.

The effects of Hamlin midwives are remarkable - when a Hamlin midwife arrives at a midwifery clinic, new cases of fistula drop to almost zero in nearby villages.

## Patient’s Story

Aye married her husband Fikre at 16. They both enjoyed life and were really excited to start a family. But when Aye was pregnant with her first child, she went into labour at home with no trained birth attendant to help. After four days of obstructed labour her baby still had not arrived.



At the end of the fourth day Fikre took her to a local hospital but it was too late. Aye lost her baby and the arduous labour caused an obstetric fistula. Grieving, she was then shocked to find urine running uncontrollably down her legs. Aye didn’t know what to do. She was devastated and concerned for her future. She stayed at home for three months before a family member told her about our hospital that treated women with this problem.

Aye travelled to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital where she was given life-changing fistula surgery, good food, physiotherapy and lots of love. After one month she was cured and able to return home.

Four years later, Aye became pregnant again. She returned to the hospital with Fikre to prepare for a Caesarean section to deliver her child safely. Her baby was delivered - a healthy baby girl. Fikre was grateful for the care his wife received. He said, *“This is the best hospital I have ever seen in my life. You cured my wife and gave me my first daughter with the best treatment and care. Thank you for everything you did for us. First I got worried leaving my wife alone here, but then I understood that she was safe after I witnessed the motherly care she received at the hospital”* She is a new woman. Aye, Fikre and their little bundle of joy now have a bright future. This is all thanks to the team at Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia and the generosity of donors like you.



## Our Medical Director

By reading our regular newsletters, you will by now know Dr Hamlin. She's quite a hero and has been running the hospital for more than 40 years. But she hasn't done this work alone.

Working alongside Dr Hamlin there are a number of people you may not know. These people work to treat and prevent childbirth injuries in Ethiopia with dedication, care, and compassion that mirror Dr Hamlin's.

As Medical Director, Dr. Fekade Ayenachew is one of the rocks on which our work stands. He is instrumental in treating patients with childbirth injuries at the Addis Ababa hospital. He also plans the treatment of patients in the regional care centres and trains doctors to address the



*Dr Fekade with Mamitu*

problem of childbirth injuries around the world. Dr. Fekade has dedicated his professional life to treating obstetric fistula and other childbirth injuries, and is one of the relatively few expert surgeons in the world for this condition. Another important surgeon at the hospital is Mamitu, a former patient who, after recovery, trained under co-founder Dr. Reg Hamlin to become an expert in fistula repair surgery.

But Dr. Fekade is much more than a skilled surgeon. Through his gentle bedside manner and concern for each woman who enters his operating room, Dr. Fekade embodies the life-changing compassion that is the hallmark of the Hamlin work.



His love for patients and respect for his staff make this gifted surgeon an incredible doctor and invaluable asset to the hospital.

## From Patient to Entrepreneur

Semira grew up in the Amhara region, a rural area in Northern Ethiopia. She first became pregnant when she was 17 years old. It was during this pregnancy that she endured an

obstructed labour, leaving her with an obstetric fistula. Tragically, as is often the case, Semira's husband left her. She suffered for four months, leaking urine and faeces. Finally she made the long journey from her small village to our regional hospital in Mekelle. She was treated – healed from her physical injuries and healed from her emotional scars. Semira wants us to know that her life was rebuilt. She made it her mission to tell as many women as she could about the importance of going to a health centre with a trained midwife to give birth. Semira remarried and returned to us when she was seven months pregnant. Her baby was delivered safely by Caesarean section.

The hospital not only treated Semira and safely delivered her baby boy, but she was taught handicraft skills that gave her confidence and unlocked her natural entrepreneurial spirit. During her hospital stay, Semira sold her handicrafts and managed to save enough money to construct a mud house and install solar panels. As her house is the only one in the village with electricity, she started a business where people pay to watch television and charge their mobile phones. Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia supported Semira's business vision and provided mentoring support along the way. She is planning to expand this business and reinvest her revenue into a bakery and bread distribution network. Not only have we been able to restore her dignity, we've been there to support her confidence and have unleashed a business go-getter!

### From Heartbreak to Hope

Emawa was a high school student who had planned to become a teacher. She fell in love and married another student but they both knew Emawa should not become pregnant before finishing their studies. The couple had never heard of contraception and before long Emawa knew she was pregnant. A few months later she went into a long obstructed labour before delivering a stillborn baby, leaving her with severe birth injuries. Sometimes a patient will be so severely injured that she will have a hole between both rectum and bladder, leaving her doubly incontinent. Such were Emawa's injuries, she leaked urine and faeces. She also suffered nerve damage causing her to have foot-drop so she couldn't walk. Her husband abandoned her and took another wife. Emawa lay on the floor of her brother's house, unable to move, utterly forlorn and alone and family members scolded her for the constant smell in the home. Emawa said, *"My sister-in-law told me I was too smelly and that no one wanted to visit the house any more"*. She stopped eating solid food hoping that she would leak fewer faeces, and for four months she lay quite still on the floor, surviving on tea and camel's milk. Her weight dropped to



just four stones. She developed sores on her buttocks and thighs from her constantly leaking urine. At just seventeen years of age she wanted to die. “People said that God had cursed me, I felt it was better to die than to have this problem”. She had lost all hope. She had wished to die. But hope came to Emawa when a family member took her to our outreach hospital in Yirgalem. Her injuries were very severe and she had to be transferred to our main hospital in Addis Ababa where our experienced fistula surgeon, Dr Fekade took care of her. She is now walking again, her weight has increased and the hole in her rectum has already been repaired. Dr. Fekade, says he has yet to deal with her leaking urine.

### What we continue to do:-

One of the worst things that can happen to a woman or girl is to develop a fistula, an internal injury caused by childbirth and occasionally by rape that leaves her incontinent, humiliated and always smelling. It is a silent epidemic. These women and girls hide themselves away because of their humiliation and shame. They are the lepers of the 21st century, and although the condition is almost entirely preventable, it is suffered by thousands of women in Ethiopia alone. They are poor, they live mainly in rural areas and they are voiceless and marginalised.

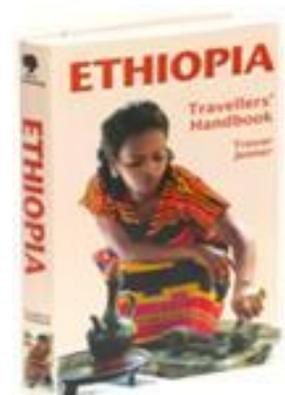
To prevent fistulas is the way to prevent maternal deaths. We at Hamlin Fistula are investing more in prevention each year by way of Hamlin midwives going out into rural areas, giving ante-natal and post-natal care, reproductive health advice, (including contraception - and men are getting involved in this), and Caesarean sections in all of our hospitals. These methods are working. Ethiopia is cutting its maternal mortality rate each year - we are seeing fewer fistula cases but there are still thousands needing our help. We are showing that these women’s lives are a priority. No doubt this seems like a grim and morbid topic, but there is no happier sight than to see a woman whose fistula has been repaired and hear the joy in her voice when she can say, “ I’m dry! ”.

### Ethiopia – Travellers’ Handbook

Author: Trevor Jenner

I am grateful to Hamlin Fistula Trustees for inviting me to tell you a little about my new book, Ethiopia – Travellers’ Handbook.

Two decades ago I travelled to Ethiopia as part of a tour group, fully expecting it to be a one-off visit. However, I was smitten by the people and found the country so thought provoking that I decided to go back – and have been going back ever since. After some time I set up a tour company and ran many tours to Ethiopia but I wanted to write a book about the country to tell the world what a wonderful place it is. After 8



years of research, photography and writing it has now been published.

The book covers just about all aspects of Ethiopia. What there is to see and do as well as covering its peoples, myths, history, development, political history, topography, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, language, fauna and more. It is easier to read than a travel guide and designed as a source of information for all who love Ethiopia.

The book also provides invaluable background information where Hamlin Fistula has outreach hospitals: Mekelle, Bahir Dar, Yirga Alem, Harar and Metu.

I have tried to make the book different from any that are available and rather more easy to read than a usual travel guide. I have also tried to make it colourful with good quality binding and eco friendly paper. It contains a lot of information that would be useful to anyone who wishes to have a quick reference guide to anything they wish to know about Ethiopia and therefore of use to anyone, not just travellers. I do hope readers of the book will have an enjoyable experience.

*Trevor Jenner* (3<sup>rd</sup> July 2016)

*The author had earlier approached Hamlin Fistula UK asking us to write an article about the fistula hospital in Addis Ababa for inclusion in his handbook - thus our link with Trevor Jenner.*

And finally, from Dr Hamlin:-

*“Our Minister of Health is behind all our work and he is confident that we will be able to eradicate fistula. He predicts a far earlier date than I do! I am encouraged by the many wonderful and dedicated people with whom we work. They are all so keen and working very hard to make positive change possible”.*

**HFUK thanks you for your continuing support.**

**Dr Hamlin and her staff are appreciative of all we do and she says, "Treating a woman with fistula gives back a life and also a mother, a wife, a daughter and a productive member of society. Life with fistula is not much of a life at all".**

**In their first hospital Dr Hamlin would often say, “When fistula patients turned up at out-patients they would be pushed to the end of the line. My husband, Reg would go to them, put his arms around them and say, “You are the most important to me today. I will see you first”.**

John Chassar Moir was a professor of obstetrics and gynaecology in Oxford who achieved distinction for his repair of vesico-vaginal fistulae. He wrote: *No branch of surgery calls for greater resource, never is patience so sorely tried and never is success more dependent on the exercise of constant care both during operation and even more perhaps, during the anxious days of convalescence. But never is the reward greater.*

The Hamlins first came to Birmingham in 1967 on a fundraising tour. Dr Reginald Hamlin lectured at the University of Birmingham, which has a Medical School with an outstanding record as a teaching hospital. The Charity was formed immediately after this visit to support them in their wonderful healing work.

### **There are many ways you can support us.**

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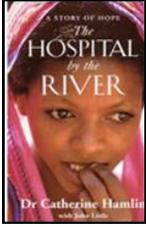
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