



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)

Message from Dr Hamlin

I send my love and greetings to you all. I want to thank you for your continuing interest and support in what we do here and for your prayers too, which we are all very grateful for and which so encourage us.

Women have for centuries been second class citizens and until they are valued and trusted as equals to men, motivation is almost impossible. Hand in hand with medical efforts should be education of men and women, farmers and labourers, as well as educated city dwellers, to raise the status of women.

We are seeing hope for this in Ethiopia, where education is spreading, where more and more of the intelligentsia are now aware of the needs of those in isolated rural communities all across this vast country. Ministries of Health and Education are working together with a will to improve the status of rural women.



Dr Hamlin

(Photo by Lucy Perry, Australia)

Our organization is just a small branch of this national need, but we are so encouraged to be able to witness improvement wherever our midwives are situated and where we have been able to train a Health Officer to do safe Cesarean section operations. Already one of these officers has done over 60 operations safely, so saving these women from an obstructed labour, a dead baby and the life-long misery of a fistula. Now we are motivated to train more of the Health Officers to do safe Caesarean section operations. We have already spoken to the Ministry of Health about this and they would welcome this idea.

In all our five centres and in our main hospital these injured women arrive in their poverty, rejection and great need of a cure. Some arrive even from neighbouring countries, Somalia and Sudan.

We have two with us from Somalia, so they are able to talk to one another and life is much happier for them. Both have very similar injuries with almost total destruction of the bladder and no urethra, and also a rectal fistula.

I would like to update you on Demen, the young lady who came to UK and had hip surgery. She is now working for us full time in our laboratory and is very happy. She wears specially made shoes with a light splint for her 'dropped foot' caused by the bullet injury which fractured her hip and damaged a sciatic nerve. A visiting doctor has promised to 'fix' this on his next visit, as tendon transplants are one of his specialties.

I send from all of us here our heartfelt thanks for being our friends and our partners in this work.

Psychological Counselling for Patients

Ethiopia is a beautiful country to easily fall in love with, but it is also a country that is likely to break your heart. It is where life expectancy is approximately age 49 for men and age 51 for women. Many children die before they reach the age of 5 and of those who survive, many young girls are married at much too young an age to cope with what lies before them. Soon after their marriage they will be having their first baby and this is not easy for many who live out in the countryside where good care in childbirth is not available.

We have read heartbreaking stories in our newsletters of young mothers who have lost several babies through obstructed labour, left cruelly injured and desperately in need of treatment from our hospitals. Many of our patients are severely traumatized and need psychological counselling to help them through their problems and this is undertaken by our own psychiatric nurses.

Sr. Belainesh Gari : Psychiatric Nurse

Psychological, psychiatric and psycho-social care is given to our patients at our Hamlin Fistula Hospitals. I have been working here for five years and my duties are to provide counselling for many of the patients. I also join Matron to supervise the staff and patients.



Sr. Belainesh Gari : Psychiatric Nurse

We have a 20 year old patient who is with us for the second time. The first time she came she had surgery, but this failed and she then developed psychiatric problems which we were treating her for. The surgery required for her to be dry is called an ileal conduit, but due to her state of mind this special operation could not be performed, so we sent her home. Sadly she was not welcomed by her father, but her mother tried to support her with the minimum income she had. She said she was kept in a room she had to share

with the few cattle that the family owns. At last she begged for money to travel again to our hospital in Addis Ababa and at present she is living at our village called Desta Mender as a waiting patient. We are now faced with a big dilemma about what is to be done for this poor woman. The operation cannot be performed due to her unstable mental status, she cannot live with her family due to the leakage and it will be very difficult for us to keep her for the rest of her life. Please pray for this patient.

So by the time a patient reaches our hospital she might have undergone several problems on top of the trauma she suffers from the birth injury. The psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, even psychosis are at times inevitable. She suffers losses, such as the baby she expected to see after nine months, she may be injured so badly as to have lost her uterus or bladder, etc. Socially she suffers from low self esteem due to the smell that the trauma produces. She might be abandoned by her husband, relatives and the community at large, so when the woman arrives at our hospital she comes with the hope of a cure and a better future. It is not always possible to cure a patient and this makes the situation very hard both for her and for us care givers. To rehabilitate her psychologically we start with a warm welcome at the outpatients' clinic. We assess her general mental status and the counselling or treatment we think will be required, depending on her situation. The counselling and/or treatment begins immediately and is followed through to her discharge.

There are also other therapies, such as group therapy where patients discuss their problems with each other, occupational therapy where they spend their time fruitfully, maybe by learning a skill and therefore a means of eventual income. Shared recreational therapy and coffee ceremonies help them feel at home. For the very few patients with severe damage that requires special procedures such as an ileal conduit operation or Mainz pouch, we assess the patient for fitness to undergo the operation. At times, the patient might be unfit for surgery and unable to reintegrate into her community due to the severe trauma, stigma and additionally, the psychiatric problem. This is a heartbreaking situation for us. We try to find any loophole to help in the outcome of her problems.

Pre-operative consent : Each patient is given an explanation regarding the operation she is to undergo and she has to consent to this before she has her surgery. This is done mainly by the psychiatric nurses, so we are able to assess the mental state of the patient. This improves her post-operative psychological stability. We are only able to help women such as these because of your generous and continuing support.

Desta Mender Rehabilitation Centre

Four young women are putting their new skills to use and have recently opened their own café, so enabling them to serve the general public and earn a living. This is the success we are working towards at our rehabilitation centre and we wish them well in this venture.



Dr Hamlin has visited the café with other members of staff, they enjoyed afternoon tea with these women.



A Midwifery Student's news

Students make the long trip back to visit their families in the countryside. On one such visit, a student found that many people in the community came to hear about what she was studying. She explained that as a midwife she will help to reduce the incidence of obstetric fistula. After hearing about obstetric fistula the student's mother proceeded to explain about a woman in a nearby village who was ostracized from the community because of the offensive nature of her sickness. The student and her mother made a trip the next day to find her. After explaining to the woman and her family that she could be cured they rallied the community together to help pay for her transport to the Bahir Dar Fistula Centre to be repaired.

Bahir Dar : Agita Health Centre

After graduating in 2010 two of our midwives were deployed to the town of Agita where they have already made a great impact on that community. The number of deliveries they are attending and the women referred for C-sections to the nearest referral point indicate the impact they are having. More women are now able to receive regular antenatal care and one husband was heard to say, "These midwives are wonderful, we like them very much." That is certainly good news.



Two new Hamlin Midwives working in Agita

There is no doubt that all of our midwives wherever they are deployed will have many challenges ahead of them. One challenge is that women come late after the onset of labour and this reduces the time available

to deal with emergencies. Building more community trust and the cooperation of traditional birth attendants and other health workers will all contribute to our effectiveness.

A Patient's Story

Soon after Etagu (*not her real name*) was married she became pregnant and as so often happens, her labour was fraught with difficulties. She spent three days in labour at home with her mother before delivering a stillborn baby and being left with fistula injuries. After a while she was ashamed of being incontinent, so having saved enough money for transportation she arrived, alone, at our hospital in Addis asking for help. She had her fistula repaired successfully and went home.



Etagu with her new baby

Etagu is with us now a second time and has been delivered by C-section of a gorgeous baby boy. She is rejoicing and eager to return home to show her family her new baby.

New Staff Members

Two new members of staff have been welcomed into the fold. We welcome Hanna who has taken up a position as Social Worker and she is already involved in a busy programme of work.



Zenebe and Hanna

We welcome also Zenebe who is our full time hospital Chaplain. Chaplaincy work is about understanding the needs and concerns of the patient or staff member. He is already someone who is assisting them to

work through difficult issues that are of concern to them by listening, showing empathy and, if requested, praying with them. This work is new to us and we hope to run a follow up programme soon.

The Story of Ethiopian Pilgrims *(as told by Dr Hamlin's son, Richard)*

I was with my mother and my wife, Diana at Heathrow Airport waiting for our flight to Ethiopia. I chatted with the Ethiopian check-in clerk, I remembered him from previous flights and that he is a fan of Shakespeare and Chaucer. Diana and I were waiting in the departure lounge for steerage class to be called, my business class mother had already swept onto the plane. It was after about 30 minutes that the Bard of Ethiopia came up to us with a clip-board and said, "Richard, would you and your wife please come with me." When we got past the heaving queue of steerage passengers and were in the tunnel, he said, "I just want you to know that the captain has invited you both to upgrade to business class so that you can be with Dr Hamlin." I spluttered a lot of thanks and said that would be absolutely fine. He smiled and left us with a stewardess.

When we found my mother she was also smiling and she told us her story.

While boarding, two stewardesses had recognised her and greeted her by name. They went off to tell the captain, he came down into business class to greet her and introduce himself. "Welcome on board, I am the captain of this plane and you delivered me at birth at the Princess Tsehai Hospital." My mother said, "Lovely to meet you—I must have done a good job! *(The captain was tall, broad and imposing.)* Also my son and his wife are on board in a different section." Without hesitation the captain said that we must be upgraded to be with her. *(As a reason for upgrade it was surely the most unbelievable and unrepeatabe.)*

We were enormously grateful to have had the extra leg and wiggle room and we were, as EAL business class is called, on Cloud Nine, as well as in it. We had a pain-free disembark, no bags were lost and there were cars, smiling drivers and AAFH staff waiting to welcome us. We had time for coffee with Annette and Mark Bennett *(CEO and his wife)* and a sleep for a short while before going off to celebrate a wedding at Desta Mender.

We have packs of 6 notelets for sale. They can be obtained in person from our Office (please phone to arrange collection) at £2.50 per pack or by post in multiples of 4 packs at a cost of £12 including post and packing.



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