



# Hamlin Fistula UK

Supporting the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia

Charity  
Number:  
1153053

## Newsletter July 2016

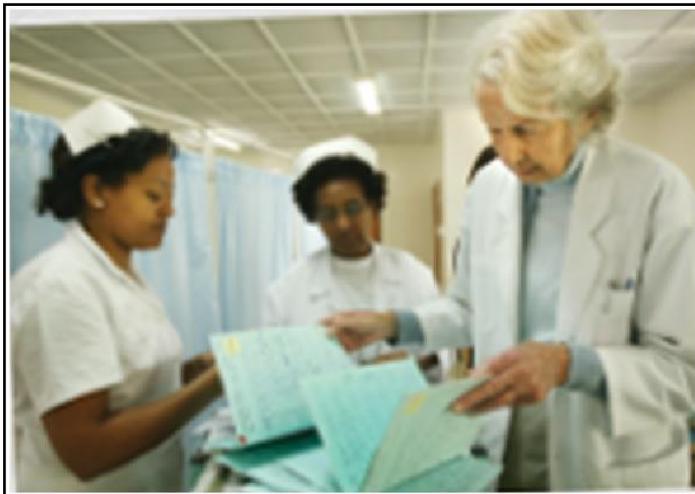
***(All patients' names are changed to protect their identity.)***

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

### **A Message from Dr Hamlin.**

It is good to be in touch with you all again and to know of your continued interest and concern for our poor patients. One day we will have plenty of our own well-trained midwives in the remote areas and only then will we see a change which will surely solve the obstetric fistula problem.

Every year we are graduating more qualified midwives from the Hamlin Midwifery College.



Approximately twenty four students graduate each time after four years of training. Some will have done more than 100 deliveries on their own and will have seen all sorts of complications during their training. I want to thank you all for your continuing commitment and financial help over so many years. I send my love to you all, *Catherine Hamlin.*

## Passing wisdom.

Sr. Gidey (on the left of the picture) is one of the many dedicated staff who realized Dr. Hamlin's vision of "A midwife for every mother".



She has dedicated many decades of work experience in the field of midwifery. She helped Sr. Marit to lay the foundation for the Hamlin College of Midwives and together they have had a pivotal role in mentoring the students to meet the international standard with clinical training. Now Sr. Gidey is proudly passing her experience to one of her first students from the Hamlin College of Midwives, Sr Abrehet. It is wonderful that one of our first graduate midwives will be able to pass on her skills to the newly recruited midwifery students.

## The Role of Husbands

Many men play a key role in learning about the hospital and the availability of treatment. They will transport their wives, sisters, and family members - sometimes on their backs - to the hospitals and regional care centres, and this provides essential support in recovery. While



women will always be the amazing survivors of fistula, men have this important role to play. A husband's love can bring a woman suffering from the loss of a child and the isolation of childbirth injuries back from despair, and give her the will to continue.

This man brought his wife to hospital to be healed. He sat outside her window for days while she was in the recovery area. He took care of their daughter, playing with her and keeping her happy while her mother was

resting. Sometimes he would peep through the window, catch his wife's eye and give her an encouraging wave and a smile, bringing her the joy necessary to completely recover in body and spirit.

## Patients Stories

First we will meet Aminat. She was 25 years old when she came to us from the Oromiya Region. She was married during her teenage years and she is the mother of two daughters aged 4 and 6. Both her daughters were born at home with no professional help or medical follow up. The family's income is based on agriculture where Aminat's husband took the responsibility of growing and harvesting many different seasonal crops from the small farm they had. Aminat continued enjoying life this way until she went into labour for the 3rd time. This time things didn't go as well as was expected, she was in painful obstructed labour for two



days. When her family realised she was in difficulty they decided to take her to the health centre which was close by. On the way there Aminat delivered a stillborn baby and the family were so relieved that Aminat did not die also. After a simple check up at the health centre she returned home and grieved for her lost baby. The strange wet feeling down her legs left Aminat very frustrated and she waited for days without disclosing her problem to anyone. She stayed in bed all day not wanting anyone to see her. She did not want even her husband and two daughters to come close to her. She stopped participating in any communal gatherings and did not

make her usual visits to her mother. The family was left in grief and her husband stayed at home with her trying to find a solution to this strange condition he had never heard of in all his life. Though her 6 year old daughter should have been at school, she stayed at home taking care of her mother. Nine months passed with no change in Aminat's condition. While chatting with relatives her mother came to know about the Fistula Hospital at Addis Ababa and this became a turning point in Aminat's life. Her husband brought her to us and now Aminat is cured of her dreadful injury. She is joyful and is ready to go home to restart her life. Aminat said, "For me those nine months were like nine long years. I was left hopeless and I would rather have died than to live with this shameful problem all my life. But now, thanks to the staff at Addis Ababa hospital they have helped me to be a woman again for free. If I have chance to see Dr Hamlin

before I go home I will get down on my knees and I will thank her for her generous work for all women like myself.”

With more of our trained midwives going into the countryside to work, the village women are receiving antenatal care to help prevent these injuries and if immediate help is needed then the intervention of a surgeon’s skilled hands is only a phone call away. Here is a story about two of our Hamlin Midwives who are working in the Aredagale Health Clinic:

“Hello friends. We've delivered even more babies this month than last,” Sr. Frehiwot exclaims excitedly, gesturing emphatically at the line graph that was steeply sloping up on the health centre wall. Sr. Ferehiwot and Sr. Azeb graduated from the Hamlin College of Midwifery in 2011 and 2012 respectively and have been working in Aredagale health centre 23 km outside of Yirgalem, a town in southern Ethiopia, for almost two years. Now, nearly half of the women served by this health centre give birth in the centre or in a hospital, rather than at home. This makes maternal and child health care easier to administer, and greatly diminishes the rates of childbirth injuries and maternal mortality in the region.

Sr. Azeb, Frehiwot’s colleague, had delivered a healthy baby boy only half an hour earlier, adding one more healthy birth to the steadily increasing number recorded on the wall. On average, two babies are delivered at Aredagale Health Centre every day and about 10% of all expectant mothers are referred to the closest regional hospital for Caesarean delivery, transported by a Hamlin car or ambulance. In the small post-delivery room, there were multiple generations of women celebrating the birth of this very new born baby boy and as many generations of men waiting outside to bring the child home.



It is also a very moving experience to hear of people like Adenach, who was given a new life in another way. She has been living with fistula for most of her adult life. Adenach heard of the Hamlin Centre at Yirgalem and is now receiving treatment at the age of what we think to be around 60.



*It is hearing about and seeing these wonderful events that gives us as Trustees the motivation to give more of ourselves to this work and to pass on the good news to you, our donors, for without you this great work would not be possible. Thank you to all who help in so many ways. We are very grateful for your continuing support.*

## **Female Genital Mutilation**

Over the past year there has been much in our news media about FGM and we who give presentations to groups are sometimes asked if this is a cause of obstetric fistula. Female genital mutilation (also referred to as 'female circumcision' or 'female genital cutting') - though debilitating in its own right, is not a number one cause of obstetric fistula. I quote here from Dr Andrew Browning, an eminent fistula surgeon who worked at our Hamlin hospitals in Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar for ten years and who now does fistula surgery across Africa. He said, "I have seen some fistula injuries due to FGM but as a secondary result. The scar formed after FGM is sometimes cut open during labour or will tear with time, but it does not obstruct the labour for long. The vast majority of fistula injuries are caused by obstruction against the bones, not the scar on the outside. FGM occurs in areas of poverty and poor education, but one does not lead to another." Dr Browning still regularly visits the hospital in Addis.

## **Hamlin Midwives**

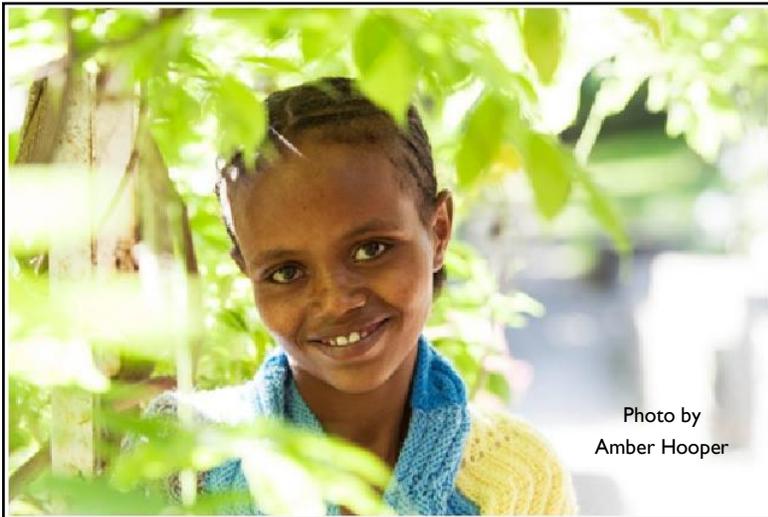
We value all of our Hamlin Midwives who are working in remote areas, because with regular antenatal care, clean deliveries in clinics and Caesarean sections where appropriate, they are enabling the mothers to have a live baby to hold and helping to prevent many injuries.

Dr Hamlin says: *"The long-term solution to this terrible injury is that all pregnant women should be able to access the care that they need. This will take a tremendous amount of work from many different people and groups in Ethiopia. Our midwives are doing what they can to provide this care, especially in far-flung rural areas where there are no medical resources for expectant mothers. It is our great hope that we will soon see fewer fistula patients arriving at our hospitals and a drop in our tragically high maternal death rates. I am awed by the challenges we face but inspired by the generosity of our supporters around the world - people like you - who make our work possible. Fistula is preventable and should not occur in Ethiopia or anywhere else in the world."*

The Midwifery College is continuing its good work, which is due to the excellent Dean and tutors. All of the graduated midwives are doing work of the highest standard in their rural home areas. There are many government health centres built throughout the countryside and our midwives are kindly allowed to work in anti-natal clinics in these centres. They are spacious, and we are given three rooms for our clinics, which is enormously helpful. Patients are increasing in numbers, and many of our clinics are very busy. So far we have midwives working in 27 of these clinics, and their reputation for good care has made them popular. Every year, as our students graduate another 20-30 Hamlin midwives are sent to these clinics in pairs.

In order to move towards achieving Dr Hamlin's goal of eradicating fistula in Ethiopia, we need to continue to provide this important midwifery care which is helping so many women in remote areas.

## **Happiness is sunshine in the garden.**



Just a few days after surgery has cured injuries so horrific she does not want to talk about them, injuries which bring tears to your eyes to read, injuries that would never have happened if she had been able to have the Caesarean she needed when her baby was stuck. Now her smile says it all. She is cured. Your support creates smiles like this, every day.

Not only do our patients suffer terrible childbirth injuries, but they are so awfully thin. Good nutrition is a crucial part of healing so we feed them well and watch them thrive!

## Lunch time at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

Traditional Ethiopian injera and wot are a luxury – most hospitals don't provide the patients with food. Our patients are fed and treated free of charge. With this nutritious food and specialist surgery, these women and girls, some of the most marginalised women in the world, women who have been pushed to the edge of their society, can have their dignity restored. Here they find hope.

“I would rather have my arm cut off than have to live with this condition” said one young lady.



Throughout the world, babies are being born every day. In Ethiopia too many mothers are still delivering their babies without any medical help. All of the staff at our Hamlin hospitals, Midwifery College and our deployed midwives work tirelessly in an effort to eradicate this problem.

We are grateful to you for your interest in these unfortunate women who have been injured by simply trying to bring a child into the world. If you wish to donate to us you will enable one more woman to receive life changing surgery and treatment for her childbirth injury. So many are still waiting to be healed. Restoring one lady's dignity is a priceless gift.

**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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**If you wish your contribution to be a Gift Aid donation, please complete and sign the form below and return it to the Company Secretary**

Mr Laurence Parkes,  
Hamlin Fistula UK,  
4 Nimmings Road,  
Halesowen,  
West Midlands, B62 9JJ

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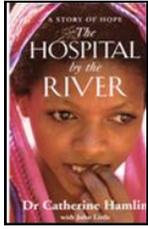
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