



# Hamlin Fistula UK

Supporting the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia

Charity  
Number:  
1153053

## Newsletter July 2019

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



On 29th May, at the AAFH Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed paid tribute to Dr Hamlin in a moving speech, expressing his heartfelt gratitude for the role she has played for 60 years in taking care of Ethiopia's most marginalised women in their greatest time of need. He unveiled a statue of Drs Reg and Catherine Hamlin. Dr Hamlin was then presented with a prestigious Good Citizen award on behalf of the Government of Ethiopia, one of only 3 people to ever receive this honour.

Hamlin Fistula UK aims to support the future and continuing strategic plan for Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia, which is: To identify fistula patients and to treat them. To provide rehabilitation services to enable the women to gain self-esteem. To train midwives and deploy them to government health centres in rural Ethiopia. These plans will help to strengthen the medical services for fistula patients, as the following stories show.

### **Life before fistula**

The story of Asnaku began more than 30 years ago and was the beginning of a long journey. Like most rural girls in Ethiopia Asnaku had never been to school or even enjoyed her childhood. Her childhood was full of hardships; she had to help her mother at home and had responsibilities looking after the family's animals. Asnaku's childhood was cut short when at 15 she was married to a farmer and had to move on to live with her new husband and begin her new life as a housewife.

When Asnaku was 18 years old she was pregnant with her first baby. Her labour lasted for three long days and left her with severe injuries resulting in a double fistula and a leg injury.

Asnaku recalls, “It was on the third day of unbearable labour that my father decided to take me to the nearest health facility which was a three hour walk away. The villagers were yelling at my father telling him not to take me to a health facility, but he ignored them. When we reached the clinic the professionals told us that I had a serious complication and they referred me to a nearby government hospital, which was another nine hours walk away from the clinic. I was unconscious for the whole journey and when I woke up I was lying in a soaking wet hospital bed and was unable to move my legs. I still remember the depression I was in whenever I think of that traumatic time.” Asnaku spent about a month at the hospital, with family members taking it in turns to care for her. However, her condition did not improve and so she was referred to our Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

The family could not afford to pay for transport to Addis Ababa so she was taken back home to her village. Asnaku said, “Life’s challenges always force us to be strong and I stayed for about a year inside the house in agony and in a stressful condition which I think is hard to shoulder in human terms. I was unable to move, doubly incontinent and ashamed of myself whenever neighbours came to visit. To raise some money they sold a family asset and this was very hard for them.

Our journey to Addis was not simple at all. Before we left home the villagers warned my father that people on the buses would soon notice the stench and turn us off and may leave us in the countryside and not knowing where to go. But my father had committed to help me. He was so strong and he held me on his two hands like a baby all the way to Addis Ababa. The end of the journey was when we arrived at this beautiful hospital where I was cured of both my physical and psychological problems.”

This was many years ago and even after her first cure of rectal fistula and the leg injury by Dr Reg. Hamlin, Asnaku’s long journey with her vaginal fistula continued for over 25 years, for after repeated surgical procedures she was not dry. The death of her father 20 years ago was the biggest loss in her life. She had lost the only person who had supported her for so many years. She went to live with members of her family who treated her as a servant because of her incontinence. She remembers that it was a lonely life and she struggled sometimes even to get enough food. Fistula had changed Asnaku’s life in many ways. Her husband left her, but above all she led a long and stressful life with a heavy heart. Her late father had lost his big asset and had fallen into poverty.



## Treatment and Recovery

To bring the story up to date, it was some 30 years ago that Asnaku had first arrived at the Addis Ababa Fistula hospital accompanied by her father. She was a living testimony to the curing hands of Dr Reg. Hamlin. She was given an appointment to return to the hospital for her next surgery nine months later, so she walked home. But once again there was no money for the return journey back to Addis. For the following 15 years Asnaku lived with her fistula without searching for a cure but leading a relatively better life through managing to live with the incontinence.

In June 2018 Asnaku decided to come to Addis again for a final and difficult surgery. Dr Fekade, the Medical Director, cured her forever, performing a diversion surgery. Following her recovery an assessment was made by our social worker and Asnaku attended the rehabilitation training at Desta Mender.



She graduated as one of the Desta Mender Rehabilitation Graduates.

*“Thanks to all the support I received from this hospital I can now begin to dream of my future. By using the training I have received at Desta Mender I plan to have my own business at the closest town around my village in Bahir Dar and lead a happy life afterwards.*

*When I first came to this hospital so many years ago, what surprised me most was the love and compassion both Reg and Catherine Hamlin showed to all of the patients. It was unique and a cure in itself. Their love empowered me to feel comfortable and helped me to know for the first time in my life that there were people who still loved me and treated me as a person. I give my thanks to them and to everyone working at the hospital today”.*

### **Meet Birke, a Hamlin Gold Medalist Midwife.**

Birke Bayu was born and raised at Debre Berihan, 120 Kms away from the capital Addis Ababa. Birke is the second eldest child of the family and was always a brilliant student throughout her school life. On her high school completion at grade 10 Birke scored straight A's in all subjects and joined the preparatory school as one of the few female students with the

maximum of four entrance points. *“Because of my caring nature, I had always been dreaming of being a doctor to help others but when this failed and I saw Hamlin’s invitation I applied to be a midwife, another caring profession of my dreams”.* After the tough entrance tests Birke joined the Hamlin College of Midwives and started studying with great passion. Throughout her stay at the college Birke was always known for being the top student and she became the high ranking student of her year. Birke graduated as one of the 20 skilled midwives of the Hamlin College of Midwives. She also received the Hamlin gold medal for being graduate of the year. Birke recalls, *“My first day at the college was amazing and I never expected such a beautiful and breathtaking site at all. I liked everything there except that it was far away from my home town. The curriculum, the methodology and its classroom setup are all so professional and standardised. I am proud to have been here and become part of Dr Catherine’s dreams of preventing birth complications, including fistula. Thank you my sponsors.”* Birke.



### **Hamlin Midwives Culture Day.**

Each year Ethiopia celebrates a ‘Nations and Nationality Day’. At the Hamlin College of Midwives this special day is named ‘Culture Day’ and it is always celebrated with a big party, organised by the 4th year students. Everyone participates wearing their beautiful and colorful dresses of different cultures. A beauty contest for ‘Miss Hamlin of the Year’, a cultural dresses show and dancing is all a part of the celebration.



Speaking at the event, Sr. Marit, the Vice-Dean of the college said *“this is a time for all of us to have a break from our routine tasks of teaching and learning and we will entertain the beauty of our nation through the different and colorful cultures each of us came from. Hamlin students here represent*



*‘little Ethiopia’ because you are from all cultures and regions of our country.*

*This party will be a lifelong good memory of your college life.”*

Sr. Marit also thanked the 4<sup>th</sup> year students for taking their precious time to prepare the party. Hamlin staff, students and fistula survivors from Desta Mender Rehabilitation Training Centre also join in this happy event.

## Our Rural-working Midwives

Jarso Health Centre is one of the seven Hamlin supported government clinics in the rural region of Eastern Ethiopia, 40Km. away from our Harar Hamlin Fistula Centre.



Sa'ada and Maurdi, were the first two professional midwives in the history of this government clinic and they set the pattern for its current excellent performance.

Following their completion of five years' service here, Sa'ada and Maurdi moved on to be university instructors.



Hana and Elili Abdo have taken their midwifery positions and are following in their footsteps.

Mebkiya, a senior midwife who mentors all the clinics in the areas around the Harar Hamlin Fistula Centre says, *“It would be right to say Hamlin has transformed the maternal healthcare service of Jarso Clinic. HFE is the biggest and oldest partner in supporting the clinic with a full package, through deploying skilled midwives, supplying essential drugs and equipment as well as renovating the maternity ward. The combinations of all these realises the high achievement that the clinic is now known for.”* According to Mebkiya, *“The installation of a solar suitcase to assist night deliveries when there is no electric light and the construction of accommodation for the two midwives is a wonderful asset for the government and community of the area.”* When Hamlin began the intervention, the yearly reported deliveries of Jarso clinic used to be thirty six but now it has multiplied to 1300 each year.

## C-arm Machine

Some patients are arriving at hospital with incontinence problems which, on examination, are not related to fistula injuries. These women are helped by undergoing other surgical procedures with the help of the new C-arm machine and operating table. C-arms work in conjunction with operating tables that are specifically designed for x-ray imaging. The table allows free positioning of the C-arm around the patient. The device gives high resolution x-ray images in real time, thus allowing the physician to monitor progress and immediately make any corrections.



Dr Fekade, the Medical Director of Hamlin, explains how the machine is used. *“The C-arm is a mobile fluoroscope machine which has a unit that emits x-rays at one end of the C bow shaped part and this lies under the patient. It has another unit on the opposite end of the C bow to intensify the images. This machine has essentially become very important in urology and other medical fields. We use it for manipulations within the body cavity and hollow organs without an open surgical approach. During its application, the patient lies between the ends of the C-bow piece of the equipment for imaging.*

*Older mechanical operating tables are not suitable to use with the new machine. The purchase of the operating table and C-arm equipment is so helpful to the surgeons and the medical team as it has reduced the hours of standing, which is so tiring and difficult for the surgeon. It also helps the patients; they do not suffer as much pain after surgery because we have been able to position them correctly. We do still use the older tables in the remaining two surgical rooms. When we get new medical equipment to replace the older, the older will usually be donated to public hospitals which do not have, but require the gadgets. We have already donated the replaced equipment from the main theatre to a government hospital nearby when they wanted to expand their services, and the rest went to the Yirgalem general hospital which is near to our outreach hospital.*

**Hamlin Fistula UK** hopes that you find our reports on the hospital very encouraging, and we thank you for your continuing support.

For anyone wishing to donate, please see pages 7 & 8 below. Thank you.

Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is one of Africa's success stories. Please help us to continue to keep the candle burning which Drs Reginald and Catherine Hamlin lit more than 50 years ago.

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Our Office is manned by our Company Secretary and volunteers and it is not open every day. If you need to contact us your message and telephone number can be left on our answer-phone and we will get back to you as soon as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

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*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.*

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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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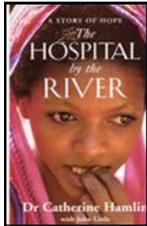
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