



## International Day to End Obstetric Fistula – 23 May

**“Fistula is fully preventable when all women and girls have access to high-quality, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services [...] Let us join forces to eliminate this global social injustice.”**

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

**G**enerally accepted estimates suggest that 2–3.5 million women live with obstetric fistula in the developing world, and between 50,000 and 100,000 new cases develop each year.

A fistula injury is a degrading condition, in which a woman who suffers obstructed labour lasting many days delivers in most cases a stillborn baby, is left incontinent and is often ostracised by her community, living alone, hiding from others so the world is not aware of her.

Since 1959 Dr Catherine Hamlin and her dedicated staff have worked tirelessly to restore the lives of women with fistula in Ethiopia. Thousands of surgeries have been performed, doctors, midwives and nurses have been trained and much fundraising has been in evidence to build hospitals to help with this important work.

Dr. Hamlin shares some of her experiences with us:

*I remember when my husband and I saw our first fistula patient at the hospital where we worked in Addis Ababa. We were touched and appalled by her sadness. She was a beautiful young woman in urine-soaked ragged clothes and sitting alone in our out-patients department away from other waiting patients. We knew she was more in need of our help than any of the other patients. She had been through a long labour of five days with only the village women to help. And so we saw the first of what has been thousands of fistula sufferers. Five percent of all women who give birth have an obstructed labour and cannot deliver their child without help, but until recent years a Caesarean section or some other skilled delivery has not been available for women in rural Ethiopia. The fistula patients are the survivors of this ordeal and, sadly, there are many who do not survive.*

*Over the years, much has improved. The Ministry of Health has given health*



**“My dream is to eradicate obstetric fistula from Ethiopia. I won’t achieve this in my lifetime, but you might in yours.”**

Dr Catherine Hamlin AC,  
Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia



services to the rural population by building health centres throughout the countryside. Looking forward, our greatest need is to have a well-trained midwife in every village in Ethiopia. Our midwifery training college took in its first students in 2007. We take 12th grade students from countryside schools to train on a four-year degree course. These girls go back to their homes to work in ante-natal clinics attached to the many health centres. As more of our students graduate we are hoping

to spread our midwives throughout the country, then women won't have to suffer this devastating ordeal. Poor country girls have little or no access to water to keep clean. They have no toilet in their home or village so they live with bodily wastes continually running down their legs. One such woman came to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital wearing the only dress she possessed and in a terrible state, but with good nutrition and plenty of rest she was soon able to receive the physiotherapy she needed before having

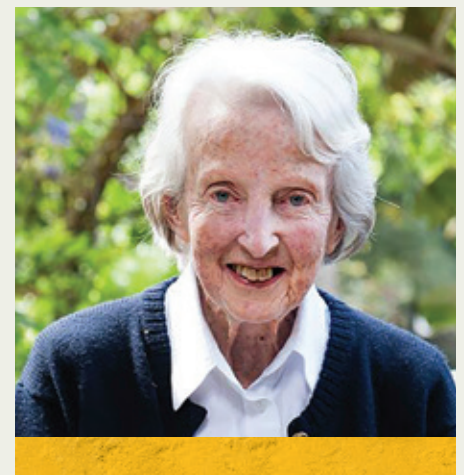
her surgery. A few months later she had her operation to correct her childbirth injuries. She was cured and went home clean and dry, wearing a new dress and with a new shawl around her shoulders. We love and cherish each mother and will work tirelessly on their behalf. Join us in reverence for all of our global mothers: may they all have access to great maternal health care that each and every one of them so very much deserves.

Dr Catherine Hamlin

**Hamlin Fistula**  
Ethiopia is run almost entirely on donations. All the gifts and money held by Hamlin Fistula Australia Limited are available to support the work of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia so it can give back to many the dignity they so deserve.



**Wokinesh** (name changed to protect her identity) was eighteen when she came to the hospital with terrible injuries from an obstructed labour. It was less than a month after her baby's delivery and she had a massive infection, two fistulas and severe contractures of her limbs. She was so malnourished that her hair was rust-coloured and because of her weakness, she could not lift herself up from the bed. Her family had just given up on her. Dr Hamlin and her team set about making her well. They fed her good, nourishing food and gave her physiotherapy. When she was strong enough they repaired her shocking internal injuries and after eighteen months at the hospital she was dry and ready to go home. "She'd just been a little skeleton lying in the bed," Dr Hamlin recalls. Wokinesh's determined will-to-live returned as her health was restored. Her entire hospital stay was funded by generous donors. On behalf of Wokinesh, THANK YOU!



**Drs. Reginald and Catherine Hamlin** went to Ethiopia to work in 1959. They were pioneers in performing surgery for women suffering from obstetric fistula. Once they began this work, the need became so great that in 1974 they established the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital specifically for women with childbirth injuries. Dr Reg Hamlin died in 1993 but Dr Catherine Hamlin never doubted that the work had to continue. The Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital is an organization that cares for women with childbirth and related injuries. These women come destitute, in nothing but their urine soaked clothes, and more often than not, barefoot. Distanced by their relatives, the hospital is their only hope; therefore all care, treatment and surgery is completely free of charge.





# Graduation – Hamlin College of Midwives

Another successful year has passed since our Autumn Issue 2014. In October of last year another group of women graduated from the Hamlin College of Midwives. Students undergo four years of training before receiving their BSc. Degree in Midwifery. A distinctive feature of the course is that students receive clinical training from the start, so that by the time they graduate they will have accumulated an enormous amount of experience in delivering babies.

The Graduation Ceremony was a grand occasion. The 24 midwives who are now highly trained were happy in knowing that they are skilled to help mothers through antenatal care, the delivery of babies and postnatal care. These skilled women will be deployed back in their home areas where they will work in pairs in a health clinic. As well as helping pregnant mothers in the village communities they will run clinics for children from birth to five years, they will offer a range of family planning services and hold women's health programmes. They are highly skilled in identifying women at risk from complications in childbirth. The mother can then be taken to a regional hospital for a Caesarean section or other suitable procedure. One new graduate had delivered 113 live babies during her training. What an achievement! Congratulations were offered to all by Dr Hamlin for now being fully qualified midwives belonging to one of the oldest professions, even mentioned in the first book of the Bible.

## Dr Andrew Browning is back training Surgeons

MANY SUPPORTERS WILL be familiar with Australian fistula surgeon Dr Andrew Browning. When he worked at Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia he was medical director at our regional outreach hospital in Bahir Dar until 2011. Andrew met Dr Hamlin when he trained at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital almost 20 years ago and they have remained friends ever since. During his time in Ethiopia with Dr Hamlin, Andrew was responsible for developing a competency based training module in obstetric fistula in conjunction with the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO). Although Andrew and his family now live and work in Tanzania, he has agreed to work with Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia in the delivery of this training and now comes to Addis Ababa on a regular basis to help with the training of surgeons from other countries.

Andrew is hoping to return to Australia briefly in July and August to visit family and some supporting churches.



Dr Andrew Browning with Medical Director Dr Fekade's team of surgeons from Addis, Urologist Dr Renata from Germany and three FIGO trainees from Yemen, Uganda and Ghana.



# Doing the seemingly impossible— *sewing together strong threads binding women around the world*

Quilting has long been a craft that has brought women together—it is a practice that is ancient and spans cultures from around the world. Sewing circles have been around as long as there have been women reaching out to support each other, to give companionship, and to share the burden. The recipient of a handmade quilt knows that they possess a treasure, and this is the gift given to nurses who graduate from the Hamlin College of Midwives in the grounds of Desta Mender, about 10km from the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

The name Desta Mender literally means 'Joy Village'; and while it is joy that can be seen on the faces of the patients as they leave hospital, it is a place that is as much about hope as it is about joy. Hope for the patients that they may have a new life without the misery of fistula created by labour; and also hope in the hearts of their nurses that through their efforts, a whole generation of young Ethiopian women will have a future where birth need not be a death sentence—for them or for their babies.

Joy too is beaming on the faces of these young midwifery graduates when they receive their hand-sewn treasures, and it is a great surprise to them that these quilts are made on the other side of the world, on the Gold Coast, in Queensland, Australia. Ten years ago, Judith McMonagle—herself a child of a family with ten children, and a mother of four, grandmother to thirteen and a great grandmother to two (so far), read of the plight of young Ethiopian child brides whose bodies were damaged during childbirth in the book *Hospital by the River*, and felt compelled to act. Her efforts began modestly—first with fundraising morning teas, then dinners, and then came the idea to sew quilts to give as gifts to the nursing graduates. The fabric, the thread and needles, the time of



Left to right: Marjory Fieldus, Sister Marie Boyle, Jan Hounslow, Nita Sputhworth, Judith McMonagle.

the sewers and quilters is all volunteered and Judith is never short of volunteers and helpers with contributions coming in from Brisbane and as far away as Mission Beach in Far North Queensland. She gives special thanks to Wanda Knight who is the master quilter in the group. Most of the quilt squares feature hand embroidery or applique work. Judith assembles the squares together and then Wanda finishes each quilt off to a very high standard.

Keen to see firsthand the work of Dr Catherine Hamlin and her team, Judith has travelled to Ethiopia several times. Her most recent visit was in October 2014 when she attended the graduation ceremony of 24 midwives, whose loving hands are saving a generation of women from misery and disgrace. Each of these young ladies received one of the quilts as you can see in the photos.

If you are interested in helping Judith, she is always happy to have more helpers on her team. Please phone the office on (02) 8007 7435 or email [emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au](mailto:emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au) and we will tell you how to get in contact with her.



Jan Hounslow with 2 quilts.



Quilt made by Margaret Hogan.



Quilt made by Noela Matthews.



Wanda Knight at the quilting machine.

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55-64	40
65-74	30
75-84	20
85-94	10
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