



HAMLIN
FISTULA
INTERNATIONAL

Treatment, prevention and raising awareness of obstetric fistulas

ISSUE CHRISTMAS 2019

Celebrating 60 years



In 1959, Drs Reg and Catherine Hamlin arrived in Ethiopia, intending to spend three years there, helping in any way they could.

In May 2019 Dr Catherine celebrated 60 years in that country as a pioneering surgeon and humanitarian, who has seen the scourge of obstetric fistula significantly reduced, and the lives of thousands of women and their families changed for the better.

During the week of celebration at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed inaugurated a statue built at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in honour of Dr Catherine Hamlin and her late husband, Dr Reg.

The Premier took the opportunity to thank

Dr Catherine Hamlin for her outstanding contribution to Ethiopia's health sector over the past 60 years and for her tremendous work of restoring the dignity of Ethiopian women affected by obstetric fistula.

A highlight of the week was when the Prime Minister bestowed an award upon Dr Catherine Hamlin on behalf of the Government of Ethiopia for her tireless contribution.

The Premier together with the First Lady Zinash Tayachew also planted seedlings in the compound of the hospital.

Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia celebrated this significant anniversary from May 23 to May 30 2019 with a number of activities, including statue inauguration, panel discussion and a photo exhibition which documented the ground-breaking work done by the Hamlins and their colleagues.

Building a bright future

By Joanne Millar

In July this year, 25 young women graduated from the Hamlin College of Midwives at Desta Mender, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. This was the ninth ceremony since the College began and brings the total number of Bachelor of Science (Midwifery) graduates to 170, most of whom are still working in country clinics.



Sister Aster Berhe, the National Midwife Advisor at the United Nations Population Fund, was the guest speaker. She said, "The degree you receive today is something you will take with you for the rest of your lives. The knowledge and skillsets you have achieved here is something no one can ever take away. You are about to graduate as midwives. You have chosen an honourable path to work with pregnant women, newborn babies, adolescent and youth and the people in need of midwifery services."

This year we celebrated the International Day of Midwives with

the theme, *Midwives – Defenders of Human Rights*. Indeed midwives are public health heroes, ensuring that a woman can have a healthy pregnancy, safe childbirth and essential care for her newborn – among the most basic of human rights.

A bridge between communities and traditional health facilities, midwives deliver vital maternal health services that are key in reducing maternal deaths and making childbirth safer in remote and underserved areas. Midwives not only save lives, they also empower women and couples to make informed, healthy choices. The absolute privilege



of being able to be with women and their families on their journey to becoming parents, and the magic of being present when a baby is born never goes away. Trust me when I tell you very few jobs are as rewarding.

Think critically on how you want to leave a mark as a professional – how you want to be of service to your people and country. You have a unique chance to make an enormous contribution. Being compassionate to and serving respectfully poor and vulnerable women, pays you back in ways not so many are lucky enough to experience. Congratulations to all who put their hearts and their sweat to make this day happen, congratulations to the families and above all, the graduates!"

Following the ceremony, the new midwives celebrated with their families, college staff and guests. Two days later all the graduates met at the Hospital Chapel and accepted a beautiful quilt made as a gift by quilters in Queensland



The midwives and their quilts.

and New South Wales, and either a Bible or Koran according to their faith. Many graduates were particularly happy to have their photographs taken in front of statues of Drs Reg and Catherine Hamlin.

At that time, the new buildings were only weeks away from being finished. They will house many departments, including pharmacy, pathology, outpatients, stoma clinic, counselling, CEO's office, doctors and administration offices. Dr Hamlin is very pleased with their design and how well they compliment the existing hospital buildings. She passed on her congratulations in the graduation booklet saying, "I am very proud to see you all successfully finished and following in my late husband Reg's and my footsteps. Never forget your fellow seniors, never forget your instructors, never forget your purpose in life...Above all, be a proud midwife who strives to save a precious life. I send my love to

you all and I wish you God's blessing in all you do for him and his people who need well-trained midwives to deliver their babies safely."

Ato Zelalem Belete Dean of Hamlin College of Midwives said, "I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to our stakeholders who have played a pivotal role in bringing today's midwives to the doorsteps of success."

Of all the messages sent to Dr Hamlin on that graduation day, perhaps it was what the graduates themselves had to say which was the most important. "Emaye (mother)," they said, "We always keep our promise to sustain the momentum of your vision to improve maternal health in the rural parts of Ethiopia."

Building for the future

If a picture says a thousand words,
these pictures speak volumes.

The newly unveiled statues of Drs Reg and Catherine Hamlin now take pride of place in the Fistula Hospital compound. On either side of them are two new buildings; a two storey outpatient clinic, pharmacy and doctors' rooms, and a second storey on an existing building which will house a new administrative centre.

While the main building work has been completed, the rooms need to be furnished and fitted out with medical equipment, computers, beds, desks, shelves and all the thousand bits and pieces an efficient hospital needs to be able to provide quality care. As well as tangible wood and metal things, a hospital needs good advice and guidance on how to be the best it can be. With that in mind, HFA board member Mr Denis Pontin spent 10 days in Ethiopia in early November, providing specialist advice on property management and policies.

As Christmas approaches, with all the attendant busyness that surrounds this time of the year, we would like to ask if you would be willing to share the bounty we have in Australia with those in Ethiopia who need a very different gift – life altering surgery or the sort of hospital care that the Hamlin Fistula Hospital has been providing for many years. Dr Hamlin has always made it clear that she is unable to do the work alone. She continues to be grateful for the stream of help provided by Australians who want to be a part of this great gift to a whole nation... and by extension, the whole world.

You may not be able to go to Ethiopia to help out at the hospital. You may not have management skills which can be shared with those who have no other opportunity to learn. But even a small gift this Christmas can provide a bed for someone who can't move, medicine for those who have been



sick for years, hope for those who have lived isolated, lonely and without hope.

As the benevolent faces of Reg and Catherine Hamlin are now looking over the work that is being done in their name, it is a joy to know that we can share in that work, and that the number of women who have been given back their lives and their hope can increase from 60,000 to a number we can only imagine. Please give whatever you can this Christmas.



Drs Reg and Catherine look down on the new building work.



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