

Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | December 2010



FROM DREAM TO REALITY

Dr Catherine Hamlin's speech at the recent midwifery graduation ceremony in Addis Ababa.

To be speaking at the graduation of our first midwives from our own College gives me enormous pleasure, and a joy which warms my heart.

Even since I started work in Ethiopia with my late husband and became immersed in the tragic plight of so many young women and girls from the countryside suffering the most dreaded consequence of obstructed labour – a vaginal fistula – there has always been, as a dream in my mind, the thought of midwives to solve this tragedy. Then we had the disappointment that the embryo college we set up when we first arrived and which we were invited to establish in Addis Ababa, failed through a lack of funds to maintain it.

In those days, in the 1960's, my late husband and I were almost alone working in a big general hospital, running the obstetric and gynaecological needs of a busy department, and with a continuous stream of patients with vaginal fistulae. So the midwives remained a dream! Then the building of our special hospital crowded out all other issues, so over the years, we to our own shame, thought only about curing such sufferers, so this dream faded even more, as we built more Fistula Centres in the country and cured more patients.

But as more and more doctors joined us for training in this field of gynaecology, and as the numbers of women we were now



Dr Hamlin and the midwife graduates

treating, and especially in all our Provincial Centres (or small hospitals) and as we heard of so many others all over Africa battling with this huge devastating injury of childbirth – an injury which is preventable – we were filled with shame and sorrow that we had made no progress over all these years to prevent this suffering. "What can we do?" was our cry! With the help of many others, and with vibrant new blood coming into our Hospital to manage and stimulate our staff with new ideas and up to date innovations, the dream of training midwives took on a new impetus, and began to be the uppermost thought in many of our minds, and even soon in our future planning.

The Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund thanks its supporters and wishes them all a very joyous Christmas and New Year. The Fund's Office will be closed for the summer holiday season from Friday 24th December 2010 to Thursday 27th January 2011.

Why not start training girls from the countryside itself to be midwives, and send them back into their own areas where they would be accepted and trusted and with clinical skills in excess of any other Colleges established in Ethiopia? There are very few midwives working in the countryside, they are mostly in the city of Addis Ababa, or in some big towns in the Provinces and many in private hospitals and clinics.

We were fortunate that there were now two people working in our Hospital – Mr Mark Bennett as CEO and his wife, Annette. I believe they were sent by God from their work in Egypt to help us in our expanding hospital management and our future planning. Both were very interested in prevention, and Annette was already a very experienced midwife, and from her years in Egypt was used to difficult conditions. She was enthusiastic about midwifery and full of ideas and energy. We were also fortunate to have the blessing and the co-operation of the Minister of Health – Dr Tedros Adahnom and it is a pleasure to welcome him here this morning to our ceremony. He has been behind all our new undertakings and I know he has an enormous concern for the women of the countryside and so he was intensely interested in our plans, and in helping us to secure land for our College. Indeed we are tremendously grateful to the Government for the land where we are sitting now – 24 wonderful acres given freely for our College!

And so we began!

Often I would see Annette with Ato Solomon, another experienced midwife, sitting together in a small room drawing up our new curriculum. This hard work took many months to finalise. Others would join them to help from time to time and soon we gathered more trained and dedicated midwifery tutors.



Annette Bennett and Yingesu Adamu

I want to congratulate all our tutors for their tremendous work and commitment to the ethos of this College. Others whom I want to mention and thank for their generous and outstanding help are Dr Barbara Kwast and Sister Beverley Stuart. Both have had much experience in the teaching that we needed, and both gave up time to spend with us and teach at our College, and also in a missionary hospital in Attat, where much clinical experience was available for our students. We are very grateful to all the staff at Attat Hospital for their help and co-operation. I know our students benefited greatly and learnt much from that country hospital, not only clinically but they also saw the love of Jesus Christ in action.

Today we have representatives from many of our overseas Trusts here with us, and it is a pleasure to welcome you all, some from far away countries. We thank you for so much help from generous donors and for all you do to raise money for us and to make this huge need known to so many, and now especially for the prevention of maternal tragedies and even maternal deaths.

I want to thank my country of Australia and its Government for their generous help through AusAid in establishing the College and continuing to support it. We all thank you for your help. And this morning we welcome especially our new Australian Ambassador, her Excellency Lisa Filipetto, who has just recently arrived to establish the Australian Embassy in Ethiopia – thank you so much for being here today.

I thank you all from my heart for the wonderful support you have all raised, and for making my dream of midwifery become a reality!

Surely our God in Heaven heard the cry of many bereaved mothers – “My baby, my baby is dead and I am a ruined wife and mother”.

So now we celebrate today the ‘first fruits’ of our College – 11 pupils whom we all congratulate for now becoming Bachelors of Midwifery, and for dedicating their lives to look after mothers and babies – mothers who have had such little care in the past in the countryside of this beautiful land. We know you have worked hard and are worthy of the success you have achieved, and now we send you out in pairs to help your country women in their greatest hour of need, when bringing a new life into the world. So you have two lives to think of, and I know you will.

Remember you will always belong to this College and we shall be ready to help you at any time, so you are not alone and can call for help which will be available. Your tutors and supervisors are ready to advise and support and help you. So be courageous and keep up the high standards you have been taught and remember these words of my husband, "a mother is a family's richest possession, a being of priceless value".

And remember that 'love' is better than any medicine, just to hold a hand and encourage is better than any drugs. God be with you all and bless you as you leave your College – your home of the last three years. May you be happy in your new positions and be faithful in your work. We send you away with confidence and with the love of all from your College and our Fistula Hospital too.

With my love again and many congratulations.



Dr E. Catherine Hamlin AC

ANNETTE BENNETT, VICE DEAN OF THE HAMLIN COLLEGE OF MIDWIVES, INTERVIEWS ABREHET TESFAY ONE OF THE NEW GRADUATE MIDWIVES

Annette: Why did you want to become a midwife?

Abrehet: Because my mother told me that she had difficulty while she delivered me. She was in labour for two days at her home with the traditional birth attendant and I was not in a good position for my mother to deliver. My mother was very weak and became very ill. Also I know many women who have died while giving birth in my area due to many factors. Knowing these things encourages me to become a midwife and I want to prevent obstetric fistula and maternal death.

Annette: How do you hope to bring about positive change for pregnant girls and women in your community?

Abrehet: As a Midwife I hope to bring about a real and lasting change to the health care of women in my community in many ways including health education. I have already carried this out as a third year student in my home area, in the local schools, the women's association, during antenatal and postnatal visits in the health centre and during home visits, the church and in



Abrehet Tesfay – Graduate, Hamlin College of Midwives

the market place. I will tell people about the positive reasons to receive health care in pregnancy, to practice family planning, the dangers of some traditional practices and the need to be prepared for the birth of their baby in case there is an emergency. I hope to improve maternity services at the health centre where I will work, such as providing better monitoring and support to women while they are in labour. I plan to encourage women to bring a support person during labour as this is generally prohibited. I believe in caring for each woman equally and with respect, like she is my own sister. My fellow midwives and I will offer consistent antenatal, postnatal and family planning care and arrange for our ambulance to come and take women in an emergency.

Annette: What do you think will be the greatest challenge?

Abrehet: The greatest challenge is convincing husbands and mother-in-laws that their wife or daughter-in-law will benefit from good antenatal care, skilled care during labour, post natal care and family planning. Because of their culture they may oppose these things. So to change this culture, I believe is a big challenge.

Annette: In what ways has your midwifery education changed your life?

Abrehet: In Ethiopia the government assigns you to a university course, and I had been assigned to do teaching. I would have left my community and most likely I would not have returned. I was successful in my application to join the Hamlin College. From this point my life was changed in that I was able to learn about the problems that face women in this country and

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now I will return to my own community to help prevent these problems and to improve the lives of local women. My life has changed so much, as I have become completely passionate about women's health and being a good Midwife.

Annette: How will you handle the situation when a woman requires an emergency caesarean section? What backup resources will you have?

Abrehet: This will depend on the situation. For example, if the mother is in shock first I have to treat the shock and then I will send her quickly in the ambulance to the referral hospital. I have the skills to manage many complications. I can also stabilise a woman who needs to be referred. I have worked in the main referral hospital for some months and I have developed good relations with the staff there who will receive the women I refer.

Annette: Will your service be free of charge? Will women requiring a referral to a hospital for a C-section be given money for transport and hospital costs?

Abrehet: Our service as Hamlin College Midwives is free of charge. Officially the service in general government hospitals is also "free of charge", however, the hospitals often do not have all the supplies needed and so the family will have to buy many things to have a C-section such as sutures, gloves and IV fluids. As Hamlin College Midwives we will try to send these supplies with the women who are transferred in our ambulance to the general hospital. We also hope that the community can contribute towards the cost of fuel.

FUND NEWS

Notice

The Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund is aware that some of its supporters have received letters from another organisation soliciting financial support for obstetric fistula related work in Ethiopia. The Fund assures its supporters that it does not disclose the names or addresses of its supporters to any other fund raising organisations.

The Fund is the only authorised representative in Australia of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia and every cent of every dollar donated to the Fund is available to support the work of Dr Catherine Hamlin AC, the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and the Hamlin College of Midwives in Ethiopia.



2011 Calendar – A wonderful Christmas present for every day of the year

Learn more about the lives and work of the new Hamlin College Midwives by purchasing the 2011 Calendar via our website or by completing and returning the detachable slip to the Fund's office.

Lighting a Candle

On Tuesday 19th October the Fund held the first public screening of *Lighting a Candle* at Macquarie University in Sydney. It was an inspirational evening and with over 300 people in attendance there was a wonderful atmosphere in which to view the Fund's new film. It was great to see so many young Macquarie University students present and taking such an interest in Dr Hamlin's work. A number of the Fund's supporters are already planning to host their own fundraising screenings. If you are interested in hosting a screening or attending a local screening in your state please go to our website or contact the office for further details:

www.hamlinfistula.org.au



Some of the audience at the screening of *Lighting a Candle*



Mariye takes her mother's advice

This is beautiful sixteen year old Mariye Belay who has spent many months receiving treatment at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. Mariye, who comes from the Amhara region in northern Ethiopia, was married at sixteen and soon became pregnant.

After enduring more than twenty four hours in labour her family finally took her to their nearest health centre but it was too late – she lost her baby and had developed a vesico-vaginal fistula and drop foot due to peroneal nerve damage.

Mariye lived with her injuries for three months before coming to the Hospital for treatment. She was carried to the Hospital by her father and brother as she had been deserted by her husband. Mariye said, "My Mum insisted on me coming here as she had been cured here before."

Before she was ready for an operation, she required prolonged physiotherapy to help her regain the strength in her legs. Mariye's rehabilitation has been successful and her fistula has been repaired.

We thank God she has been cured and wish her happiness with her new start in life.

The Fund also thanks all its supporters who help women like Mariye and her mother to find new life at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.