

Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | June 2007



"The Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital is the only facility in the world exclusively dedicated to treating (obstetric) fistula.

It serves as a centre of excellence, offering training and pioneering surgical techniques and methods of physical and psychological rehabilitation for women"

United Nations Population Fund

FROM DR ANDREW BROWNING

This young woman was one of the first patients in Bahir Dar. After four days of labour at home with her first delivery, she suffered an obstetric fistula and delivered a stillborn child. After months of misery during which, her husband left her, she was able to come to the Bahir Dar Hamlin Fistula Centre and have a successful fistula repair. When she returned to her village, she remarried and came back to the hospital when she was 7 months pregnant and waited there until she was able to deliver her precious child by caesarean, at term. She was delighted to have such a beautiful baby girl and has now returned home with her new family.

FROM DR CATHERINE HAMLIN AC.

OUR DEAR FRIENDS IN AUSTRALIA,

The last few months have been busy ones and quite exciting. We have had a teaching training course for our staff, led by two overseas experts. Then there was a week of entertaining and meeting with other fistula surgeons from the Developing World - but more of this later!

EASTER CELEBRATIONS AT THE HOSPITAL

Easter for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, this year, fell on the same Sunday as our Easter. The day began early for our patients, with a visit from the nearby St Gabriel's Church. They brought food for all our patients. This is an annual visit and gift, and the kindness of such an act always touches my heart. The visitors arrive with big baskets and cauldrons of food ('injera' - local pancake-like bread, and spiced meat 'wat', or stew). They then serve out breakfast for every patient and distribute it to each one, which is a treat after the long fasting days of Lent! Later, a deacon stood in the main ward, read the resurrection story from one of the Gospels, then said a few words and prayed.



The medical director, Dr Mulu Muletta

On the Tuesday after Easter we had our own Easter Service and celebration in our Chapel. The chapel looked very festive and beautiful, and was crowded with our staff. Dr. Mulu, led the service, with our doctors and our matron also taking part. The choir led by Sister Ruth Gadissa sang well and of course we all joined in with enthusiasm! After the service lunch was provided for everyone, in the garden under the spreading

thorn trees (acacia). The kitchen excelled with plenty of delicious food for everyone!

It was special to have Dr. Ambaye here. She had some Easter leave from her study course in Leeds U.K. Later in that week Ambaye did a difficult operation on a little patient from Chad.

CERTIFICATES FOR LONG-SERVING STAFF

We had another celebration on another occasion at Desta Mender. It was to honour and give Certificates to the staff members who have been with us for over 15 years. There were many of these, some have even been with us from the time we opened the hospital in 1974!

We used the opportunity to also give our special thanks and a certificate to a few staff members who were retiring due to their age! It was a most enjoyable day in that beautiful spot. The speeches and distribution of certificates was from the verandah surrounding our Teaching Centre with the audience seated beside the lake.

Some of the permanent residents at Desta Mender received rewards for completing the courses they were undertaking, or for the grades they had reached in their school work.

ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE

The Desta Mender residents had set up a number of stalls. Some were selling vegetables, they had grown, and others sold clothes made by the sewing group. The catering group of four girls, were selling biscuits, jam and even honey from our own hives, other groups had a table of baskets, and others craft items! It was so well organised and the girls brimming with happiness as they sold their wares!

The professional way in which everything was conducted was most impressive.

Recently, we had the help of a lady volunteer from England, Rosemary Burke. Rosemary has expertise in setting up micro-enterprise developments, which assists underprivileged people market their products and help others start and to run a small business enterprise. Already there is progress in this area and the improvement in the morale and happiness of the residents is quite marked.

FORMATION OF 'INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF OBSTETRIC FISTULA SURGEONS'

Soon after Easter we had visits from a group of other fistula surgeons working in Africa - this was a result of a recent 'fact-finding' visit to West Africa by our CEO Mark Bennett and our Dr. Biruk. They visited several countries in West Africa and obtained information about fistula Centres being set up. In Northern Nigeria they met Dr. Kees Waaldrk, a Dutch

surgeon, who has been working there for over 25 years. He is doing wonderful work at several hospitals in that area. His results with fistula surgery are excellent and his enthusiasm is infectious.

As a result of discussions with Dr Kees, the idea of a fistula surgeons meeting at our hospital arose! All the prominent doctors in this field (and there are pathetically few of them) were contacted. Most came to a Conference in early April. It was a great week, with lectures and discussions with our visitors, and doing operations together.

We decided to form an organisation of fistula surgeons and to call it - "International Society of Obstetric Fistula Surgeons"! So far we are 14! The aim of this Society is to treat more patients, to learn from one another, to train gynaecologists, surgeons, and any doctor or health officer working in Developing Countries, who has a compassion for these women.

TRAINING DOCTORS TO INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Our next visitors were two gynaecologists from overseas, both are involved in training. Dr Jeff Smith came from the John Hopkins prestigious Medical School and Hospital in America, and belongs to an organisation called "Jhpiego" exclusively involved in training and the art of communicating knowledge. He was here for a week and helped us develop a training package suitable for obstetric fistula care and management. This 'package' will help us to be better equipped, as teachers, for the many doctors and nurses from other countries that come to us to be trained.

The other gynaecologist was from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Britain, Dr Patrick Hogston. These two worked together to help us develop a suitable, high standard training program, and Patrick specifically came here to see if we can qualify as a Training Centre internationally. This would be an advantage for our many post-graduate students that are with us month by month for training!

MIDWIFERY TRAINING COLLEGE

Last week we interviewed candidates for Teachers of midwifery, and a possible Director for the School. Preliminary work for the building of the training Centre next to Desta Mender has begun. We are still waiting for the final decision about obtaining the extra land.



Mark Bennett outside the Fistula Centre in Jos, Nigeria

By September we should have 15-20 students enrolled to start their 3-year course, which will be to BSc standard. This is wonderful news. At last something worthwhile to help prevent this maternal tragedy is on the way!

REPORT ABOUT 'SIMEESH'

Unfortunately, we do not have much encouraging news about the patient mentioned in the last issue of my Newsletter in the article written for the New York Times. X-rays have revealed a complete destruction of the bones that hold her pelvis together in front. So there is just a huge gap there and no pubic bones are even visible on the X-ray. Our orthopaedic consultant was shocked and also mystified about its etiology. This, together with her hip contractures makes walking impossible, and although her knees have become less contracted, she is still in bed or in a wheel chair.

Nevertheless her spirit is undaunted, and it is a joy to see her smile every day. She listens to Bible tapes, reads quite well and is learning to knit. Every day she goes to the Physiotherapy Department where she has quite a social life with the other crippled girls. But of course her fistula injuries are still not yet repaired.

We have much to be thankful for. Our faith and trust in God is daily strengthened, as we see our plans unfold, and know that we have an Almighty and loving God who is guiding us.

Thank you again for all you do, we appreciate so much your love, your concern, your help and your prayers for these poor women.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Hamlin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Catherine Hamlin

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A recent study estimated that there are 40,000 'old cases' of obstetric fistulae in Ethiopia, with an estimated 9,000 new cases each year. The work of the Fistula Hospital to help fistula patients, is continually expanding.

- The main Hospital in Addis Ababa is committed to treating the complicated cases of fistula injuries and servicing the other regional Hamlin Fistula Centres. It needs more facilities to do this. In the last three months they have treated 357 patients.
- The Village Desta Mender is not only caring for patients that cannot be fully cured but is involved in teaching and training them to be able to be employed in various fields of work. Some are doing various studies, others are being trained as nursing aides or 'carers'. Some are involved in agriculture and producing saleable craft work.
- The regional Hamlin Fistula Centres at Bahir Dar, Mekelle, and Yirgalem are now fully functional, although some further building work may be necessary. The building of the Hamlin Fistula Centre at Harer is about to commence, while



Map of Ethiopia. The location of the Hamlin Fistula Hospitals in red

plans for the Centre at Metu are still being developed.

- The Midwifery College is a long-term training/teaching program. Progress is being made but many aspects of this project are still in the planning stage. The Hospital is negotiating to obtain separate, additional land adjoining the Desta Mender Village with the intention of building the teaching classes for the students, on it.

BUILDING NEEDS AT ADDIS ABABA FISTULA HOSPITAL

In April, our Australian Honorary Consulting Architect, Mr Ridley Smith, was able to break his return journey from the Middle East, to visit the Hospital, to advise on the Hospital's need for additional accommodation at the main Hospital in Addis Ababa.

It is 9 years since, the Hospital complex at Addis Ababa was rebuilt with financial help from Australian donors and the Australian Government (AusAID).

With the development of the Hospital's three regional Fistula Centres, the two other Centres that are to be built, as well as the Desta Mender Village and the proposed Midwifery College, more space is needed at this central control point of the Hospital's work.

Some of the problems are

- the pathology laboratory is now too small
- the pharmacy needs more secure storage space
- more general storage space is required

- the administrative offices are inadequate
- the fence around Dr Hamlin's home has collapsed, it needs a strong retaining wall and security fence
- a doctors' and nurses' Resource centre is required
- a trauma counselling and therapy centre is needed
- larger classrooms are needed for nurse/nurse-aides training



Dr Catherine Hamlin with Mr Ridley Smith in April 2007

Currently, there are number of waiting/hostel beds, with two patients to a bed. This is certainly not desirable but these young women are glad to be safe with a 'roof over their head' in a caring environment.

Ridley is well qualified to advise on all of these matters and is working on plans and estimating the costs to submit to the Hospital's Trustees.



THE HAMLIN INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

Many generous donors have been giving to the Foundation over the past 18 months, and we wish to express our appreciation for this help. Already income from the foundation is going to the work of the Hospital.

One of Dr Catherine Hamlin's greatest wishes in recent years has been to establish the Foundation to ensure that the work of the Hospital will be maintained after she is unable to continue this work.

If you would like your gift to be used for this purpose, please indicate in the appropriate box on the Donation slip over page.

"....every cent of every dollar donated through the Hamlin Fistula Relief and Aid Fund is available for the work of the Fistula Hospital.."

Please accept the attached donation for the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital through the **HAMLIN FISTULA® RELIEF & AID FUND**

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