

# Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | June 2011



## DR HAMLIN'S LETTER

### *My Dear Friends in Australia*

It is time for another letter to you all. First I want to thank you for your continuing interest in what we do here and for your support and prayers too, which we are all very grateful for, and which so encourage us.

#### **Improving the status of country women**

We know now that many in the Western world are aware of the neglect of country women in Ethiopia and in the whole of Africa and beyond, where they have no access to ante-natal care or safe deliveries. But how to address this need and how to do it urgently is another matter! I know that the local people themselves must be the spearhead, but how to motivate them is difficult.

Women have for centuries been second class citizens and until they are valued and trusted as equals to men, motivation is almost impossible, and will continue to depend on efforts of the few coming from the wealthy countries of the world to be the spearhead of this task. So hand in hand with medical efforts should be education of men and women, farmers and labourers as well as educated city dwellers to raise the status of women.

But we are seeing hope for this here in Ethiopia – where education is spreading, where more and more of the intelligentsia are now aware of the needs of those in isolated rural communities all across this vast country and the Ministries of Health and Education are working together with a will to improve the status of rural women.

We are just a small branch of this national need, but we are so

encouraged to be able to witness improvement wherever our midwives are situated, and where we have been able to train a Health Officer to do safe caesarian section operations.

Already one of these officers has done over 60 operations safely! Saving these women from an obstructed labour, a dead baby and the life long misery of a vaginal fistula. So now we are motivated to train more of the Health Officers and would welcome Australian obstetricians who would be willing to come for a few months and work in a country hospital to train Health Officers to do safe caesarian section operations.

The Ministry of Health would welcome this idea, as we have already spoken to them about this.

#### **Somali and Sudanese patients**

In all our five centres and in our main hospital these injured women arrive – some even from neighbouring countries in their poverty, rejection and great need of cure. The Somali patient I mentioned and whose photograph was in my last letter is looking much better and can now be seen in our Physiotherapy Department where she goes every day. She will soon be walking with a frame, I hope!



**Special August event in Sydney with Mark and Annette Bennett. See inside for details**

There is another young woman from Somalia at the Hospital as well and so they can talk to one another and life is much happier for them both.

This second girl is not yet well enough to go for physiotherapy, but is having it in her bed and can sit in a wheelchair on the verandah and enjoy the sunshine. Both have very similar injuries – with almost total destruction of the bladder and no urethra, and also a rectal fistula.

Another girl from neighbouring Southern Sudan was flown to us with an interpreter, as she speaks only one of the 500 languages of that country. It is spoken by a small group of people including the Pastor from the church she used to attend. So he came with her, but needed to return after 4 days – so we were worried as the patient was nervous and frightened. But a miracle happened on Good Friday! I took the Pastor to church and after the morning service I saw him talking to another African man who was not Ethiopian. I approached them as they talked and heard to my amazement that this man was another Sudanese who came from the same group of people as our patient and could speak her language! He was willing to come back with us in the car to meet this girl. He was a refugee who has lived here in Ethiopia for 6 years with his right hand almost totally missing from a war injury. So now he has taken the place of the Pastor, having given us his mobile phone number. He is willing to come at any time. So soon we shall call him to help us talk to her about her planned operation and give her comfort and assurances. That the Pastor should single out this man to approach after Church, probably to be kind as he saw him standing alone, was truly remarkable. Surely this was arranged in Heaven!

Professor Gordon Williams has arranged with the Pastor to be our agent in the Southern Sudan and to collect patients for us. We hope one day to set up a place where the surgery can be done. He and Mark Bennett are planning a visit at the end of this year to see what is available and where we could help. We hope and pray that when the North and South Sudan become independent that peace will prevail.

#### **Australian Visitors**

We have had many visitors since my last letter in March, but a special group I want to mention were Australian Parliamentarians, here on an official visit as guests of the

Ethiopian Government. They spent one whole Saturday with us – first going to the Midwifery College. Then to see Desta Mender and to eat Australian meat pies in our café there!

Then the afternoon was spent at the Hospital where Mark Bennett gave an excellent talk in the Chapel, showing pictures of our five regional fistula hospitals and answering many questions.

It was a busy day, but ended delightfully with a reception given by our recently appointed Australian Ambassador, Lisa Filippetto. This was held in her lovely new home in the foothills of the Entoto Range, where the lights of the city below vied with the stars for brilliance! Here I met two visiting orthopaedic surgeons from Perth, who had been working at a big government hospital in Addis Ababa and were about to leave. They agreed to see some of our patients and came on the following Monday giving us good advice and promising to come again early next year when they return to work at the Black Lion Hospital.

Naturally I introduced them to Demen, whose story and successful hip surgery in London I wrote about in my last letter to you. Demen is now working full time in our laboratory and is on the pay roll, so she is very happy. We are still searching for nearby accommodation for her, but in the meantime she is staying in the home of a kind Canadian woman – a teacher whom she got to know when a school girl. She now wears specially made shoes with a light splint for her "dropped foot", caused by the same bullet injury affecting a nerve. One of the Perth doctors has promised to "fix" this on his next visit, as tendon transplants are one of his specialties. He inspected our theatres and said they are excellent (orthopaedic surgeons are very fussy!).

#### **Our special Easter service**

Finally I must mention our inspiring Easter service that we hold every year a few days after Easter – but this year it seemed special! Our Misgana Bet ('House of Praise') or chapel was packed. The staff choir was led by Sister Ruth Gadisse and with a real drummer playing a big Ethiopian Church drum while someone else played a keyboard. In the centre was a table with a lovely carved Ethiopian wooden cross and a bowl of roses.



Easter service

All this made the Chapel look so beautiful for such an important service.

The choir excelled and sang with exuberance; also passages about the resurrection were read from the Bible in both Amharic and English and our speaker of previous years gave a short talk. This was translated into English and we closed our service with prayer. Afterwards we enjoyed a lunch from our kitchen in the garden.



Hospital staff enjoy the Easter lunch

So now I say good-bye and again send from all of us here our heartfelt thanks for being our friends and our partners in this work.

My love and greetings to you all.



Dr E. Catherine Hamlin AC

### UPDATE FROM MARK BENNETT, CEO HAMLIN FISTULA ETHIOPIA

The first part of 2011 has kept us extremely busy, as we expand our activities and take on the challenges these present.

Our new centre at Metu is increasing its case load and starting to have an impact in the far west of the country. We are also seeking to build partnerships with other organizations to assist us in patient identification throughout Ethiopia so that our reach to the general rural population increases further. For more than 18 months we have been working at a rural health centre at Dangla (in the region around Bahir Dar) to implement comprehensive Emergency Obstetric care. This project is now up and running and in just over 3 months 50 women have had successful Caesarian sections. The lives of a number of women and their babies have been saved and many other mothers have avoided the risk of severe injuries. The number of normal deliveries at the location is also significantly increasing as the community builds confidence in the services there. We have supported this through supplying equipment and mentors for the newly trained staff. We hope to expand this successful model in the coming year.

Our 11 midwives, who graduated last October, are also now having significant impact in the five rural communities where they are based. I have been overjoyed to visit some of these locations where the number of live and safe births is increasing through the skills and support which our midwives give to expectant mothers.

In March we held a special board workshop to develop our Ethos Statement. This outlines the kind of organisation which Dr Hamlin and her late husband have developed and which will assist others to maintain and promote this same ethos in the future. This important matter will be discussed at our International Partners Meeting which will be held at the Hospital in early June. We are looking forward to representatives from our various Partner Funds, including Australia, coming to this meeting. This will also be an opportunity for us to show our Partners the progress we are making on many fronts and to plan for the further expansion of our work so that we are able to help more rural

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women through our treatment, prevention and educational programmes.

We have commenced a project with Ernst & Young to review our pay scale, market salaries and also our performance measurement systems. This is a big challenge in a country where such ideas are only just being introduced, but it will enable us to ensure we pay suitable salaries, recognise the good efforts of our staff and achieve our strategic plans. Building continues in many locations and we have a new construction supervisor on staff who is assisting to ensure that our builders' work is up to standard, on budget and on time.

On a personal note, Annette, our four children and I are looking forward to spending our forthcoming furlough in Australia visiting family and friends and catching up with some of the Hospital's supporters. We hope to see some of you at the Australian Fund's special event at St Thomas' North Sydney on Wednesday 17th August where Annette and I will be speaking about the work of the Hospital and the Midwifery College.

Until then, we join with Dr Hamlin in thanking you for all your continuing interest and generous support of our work.

Mark Bennett

### FUND NEWS

Professor Gordon Williams, the Hospital's Medical Director, spent a few days in Australia in February on his way to a medical conference in Christchurch. He met with doctors at the Sydney Adventist Hospital and spoke to pathology staff at Sonic Health Care. Both these organisations have generously supported the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital for many years.

Professor Williams also met with the members of the Board of the Fund. Whilst in Australia he spoke about the Hospital's recent work in Afghanistan.

*As part of our strategy to build long term links with fistula centres in other poor countries Dr Habte, Sr Berhane and I spent a week operating and teaching nurses and doctors at the CURE hospital in Kabul.*



Mark Bennett with patients

*As a prelude to our visit we had already started training 2 of their doctors and nurses over the previous few months in Addis Ababa. Eleven patients were successfully treated whilst we were in Kabul. The women were a little older than those we see in Ethiopia and all came with their husbands who were accommodated in the hospital grounds. The fact that Dr Habte and I are men was not a problem and the delight expressed by the patients and their husbands when realising that they were now dry was a pleasure to see.*

*There were also useful discussions with the hospital management on how to further this training programme. Since then we have provided training to two more doctors and a nurse. The three of us are planning to return to Afghanistan in June.*

Having survived the dangers of Kabul, Professor Williams had a lucky escape in Christchurch. Fortunately he was out of the city centre at the time of the devastating earthquake but he lost all his luggage in his hotel, which was badly damaged.



**Lighting a Candle will be screened at Brisbane Girls' Grammar School on Friday 17 June 2011 at 6.30pm. For further details and to purchase tickets go to [www.thegrace.com.au](http://www.thegrace.com.au)**

## *Special event*

The Hamlin Fistula Relief® and Aid Fund is delighted to announce that



*Mark Bennett,  
CEO Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia and  
Sr Annette Bennett,  
Founding Dean of the Hamlin College  
of Midwives*

will be speaking on the progress of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and the Hamlin College of Midwives on Wednesday 17 August 2011 at St Thomas' Anglican Church corner of Church & McLaren Streets, North Sydney, at 7.30pm.

Please contact the Fund's office to advise if you will be attending on (02) 800 77 435 or [emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au](mailto:emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au)

Attendees will be invited to pay a small entry fee to help cover the costs of the evening.



The 50 kilometre Walk for Women from Coogee to Turramurra (in Sydney) is being held on Saturday 11 June. Registrations have closed but if you would like to encourage the 120 women who are walking for the women of Ethiopia, you can make a donation via our website: [www.hamlinfistula.org.au](http://www.hamlinfistula.org.au) or post this slip to us with your cheque or credit card details.