

# Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | March 2008



## *Official Reception*



Dr Catherine Hamlin AC



Her Excellency, Professor Marie  
Bashir AC CVO, Governor of NSW

The Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund is holding a reception in honour of Dr Catherine Hamlin AC in The Great Hall at Sydney University on Saturday 15th March 2008 at 2.00pm.

Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales has graciously accepted the Fund's invitation to attend the reception and to welcome Dr Hamlin.

Afternoon tea will be served in the University grounds following the formal proceedings.

Anyone interested in attending the reception is welcome and admission is by ticket only, as seats are strictly limited.

Tickets may be purchased via the Fund's website at [www.fistulatrust.org](http://www.fistulatrust.org) or by completing the attached slip and posting or faxing it to the Fund's office.

## FROM DR CATHERINE HAMLIN AC

### DEAR FRIENDS IN AUSTRALIA

This letter reporting on the progress and prosperity of the months since December will also be the last letter before my trip to Australia in March, when I hope to be able to meet many of you and to thank you personally for your enormous support, for your love and for your concern and interest in the welfare of the needy and neglected women who suffer terrible injuries from unassisted and prolonged obstructed labour.

### MIDWIFERY COLLEGE BECOMES A REALITY



The new Midwifery College

The most exciting event to report is that our Midwifery College is now functioning. We have not had the big official opening yet, as many buildings are still to be constructed. In fact, we have only in the last two weeks received full possession of the land promised by the Government, for this purpose. So there is still much to do and to build.

On January 21st we welcomed our main donor from America, Dr Carol Osborne who is a Doctor of Theology. We were able



Anatomical class at the Midwifery College

to show him the completed and functioning teaching complex, and the almost finished big canteen, which can also be used as a lecture hall! The tutors and students were all introduced and we had a tour of their class rooms, their library and sleeping and eating areas – these latter two areas are only temporary, but nicely fitted out to make three bedrooms with four students in each and a house mother's room as well. An old dilapidated picnic area at Desta Mender beautifully re-constructed by one of our workers, makes a temporary spacious dining room with kitchen attached, where incidentally Dr Osborne and our staff and students had a delicious lunch! So the day was one of pleasure and excitement. Dr Osborne was impressed and pleased to see how the money from his Foundation has been spent, to hear our future plans and to view the land where more buildings will be constructed. After our most recent meeting of the Hospital Trustees which was held at Desta Mender, our Chairman was anxious to inspect the college. The first anatomy class was in progress



Dr Hamlin and Matron Ejigayehu with former Desta Mender residents trained in catering now working at the Midwifery College and living independently in the local community

with tutor midwife Nurse Solomon lecturing beside an anatomical model! Our chairman was impressed and gave a short speech to the twelve bright and eager students, who all greeted him in the polite and charming manner still engrained in the tradition of Ethiopia, especially in the countryside. It was a lovely day, and for me very special as the need for midwives as a prevention for this suffering of mothers has been on my mind for so long. To thus see it now beginning is exciting!

## CELEBRATIONS AND AN AWARD

Two important church festivals were commemorated in January – Ethiopian Christmas on January 7th and Timkat, or Epiphany, on the 20th. Each were celebrated as Christian festivals but certainly not as we do in the West. We were able to give all our patients and staff small presents at Christmas, and special meals and, of course, both days were national holidays.

Another event I should tell you about was a trip on December 9th to Awassa (a town in the Rift Valley, south of Addis Ababa), when our Hospital and work was honoured by a special award for being the best Humanitarian and Social Service in Ethiopia. This was a big occasion when others too received prizes, for various accomplishments, so the township was in festive mood.

A bus load of staff from our Hospital joined in the celebration! We all sat under a huge canopy, and I was the one to be presented



Dr Hamlin receives award from the Ethiopian President

with this award by the President of Ethiopia His Excellency Ato Girma Wolde Geiorgis. All I had to do was walk from my seat to where the President was sitting in an arm chair (as he is still recovering from a mild stroke) and to be greeted and thanked by him for the work of our Hospital and its Outreach Centres. He is very knowledgeable about what we do, as he opened Desta Mender in 2003. After the ceremony we ate a delicious restaurant meal of fresh fish from Lake Zwai, one of the Rift Valley chain of lakes, running down to the Kenya border, and then we drove back home in the late afternoon by a new route to see beautiful countryside as the sun was setting.



## A BUSY HOSPITAL AFTER HARVEST TIME

Our patient load is always heavy in the month of February, due to the harvesting in the countryside being over, and so a male relative is more likely to be available to accompany our poor fistula women to Addis Ababa. The women are often brought to the Hospital by a father or a brother as in many cases the husband has left them, especially if it was a first pregnancy. One such arrived a few days ago, when I was in the Outpatients Department seeing new arrivals. This poor girl was so emaciated that she had to be carried in by her father and brother, both farmers from the countryside around Ambo and desperately poor. They told us they were giving her little to eat as her bowel contents were being passed through her birth passage, and they thought that by starving her this condition would be helped! Her injuries are extremely severe involving both bladder and rectum. She will need a temporary colostomy and many months of rehabilitation before her fistula injuries can be repaired. Seeing her in the ward a few days later lying in a clean bed, eating a nourishing meal and with a smile on her face was indeed touching, her eyes no longer sunken from dehydration, and her face starting to look less gaunt!



A patient receives love and care from Sister Hannah

The overcrowding of our Hospital is very evident at present, seeing often two in every hostel bed even with both being incontinent. But it is still better than lying in the streets! When I recently passed our small teaching room there were thirty-seven young women crowded together as they listened to our Ethiopian "chaplain" speaking to them and teaching them from the Bible. The work of this kind man is a great comfort and blessing for many, as he helps with their spiritual needs, often sitting by the beds of patients in the wards to talk or to pray with them. We feel justified in constructing a new building for

teaching, when we see the overcrowding in our present small room, and when we see teaching bringing such benefits for our patients. And so we have asked our architect to design such a building, and have a space for it already allocated!

I know our staff would wish to add their thanks to all of you in Australia who help us care for these suffering women, as I do too. We also send our love.

*Catherine Hamlin*

Dr Catherine Hamlin AC

## FROM DR ANDREW BROWNING IN BAHIR DAH

I would like to share with you this story about Belaynesh. She is a very beautiful young 21 year old woman. She was married at the age of 10, which is not uncommon here. Her husband, who was in his 20's or 30's was unable to have intercourse with her as she was not developed, so he got a small sickle used for harvesting the local grain and cut her birth canal open to enlarge it. He only cut straight into her rectum, leaving her totally incontinent of stool. He then divorced her and she went to live with her parents shut away in a room for 11 years.



Belaynesh had been crying for 11 years

Her sister heard about us on the radio and told her parents that she must come here. When she arrived her eyes were puffy. When I asked her why, she replied that she just cries every day.

Praise God that she was cured by a straight forward operation. She was transformed and smiling. When she was discharged she gave us all hugs and said that she would go to all the churches in her region and tell of the work that we do.

We also had another lady come back to us for follow up after her operation. She had written in red pen on her white T-shirt 'Go to the Bahir Dah Fistula Centre, you will be cured'.

It is nice to get some free advertising!



## FUND NEWS

### STUART AND BILLIE ABRAHAMS RECEIVE ROTARY AWARD

As many of our supporters will know, Stuart Abrahams has been the driving force behind the Fund for the last 14 years. He has recently stepped aside from active management of the Fund but he and his wife Billie still maintain a close interest in the work of Dr Hamlin and the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. Many Rotary Clubs and Rotary International have been strong and generous supporters of the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital during the time Stuart has worked for the Fund. For many years, the Lane Cove Rotary Club, has made an annual gift to the Hospital. Stuart and his wife Billie were invited to the club's meeting in November, for Stuart to receive the donation in person, and to report on progress at the Hospital.



Stuart and Billie receive their award from Past Rotary President Lindsay May (left) and the current President John Norris

To their very great surprise and pleasure Stuart and Billie were named 'Paul Harris Fellows' *"...in appreciation of tangible and significant assistance given for the better understanding and friendly relations among peoples of the world."*

A well deserved honour for them both!

### *A Walk to Beautiful*

Almost 800 people came to the Sydney Premiere of *A Walk to Beautiful* in December which was screened at the Orpheum Picture Palace, Cremorne.

A post screening reception was held across the road at the Cremorne Hotel which also assisted in providing an area for the

overflow audience to see a simultaneous screening of the film.

This feature length documentary shows the plight of five fistula sufferers and how they make their way to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and receive a 'new life'.



Compere Jenny Brockie, with the producers Steve Engel (far right), Allison Shigo (far left), and the Fund's Executive Officer, James Grainger

Award winning documentary film maker and broadcaster, Jenny Brockie compered the evening and interviewed two of the producers, Steve Engel and Allison Shigo, who flew to Australia from New York specially for the screening.

Steve and Allison spoke of how Allison and her colleague Mary Olive Smith journeyed for weeks through the harsh Ethiopian terrain searching for women suffering from obstetric fistulae. The incontinent and smelly condition of obstetric fistula sufferers makes them outcasts and they are often hidden away in shame and guilt.

Almost by chance the producers found a woman who had been cured by the Hospital living in a remote village and she led them to her 'leaky friend' whom she had been encouraging to make the long arduous trip to Addis Ababa for treatment. Other fistula sufferers then came forward and their willingness to talk openly in front of the camera about their physical and psychological pain was something which profoundly moved the producers.

Dr Hamlin has described the documentary as 'very moving' and 'very typical' of the conditions and situation of the women in Ethiopia who suffer from obstetric fistulae.

The Fund is very grateful to Jenny Brockie, the Cremorne Orpheum, the Cremorne Hotel and to the sponsors who made the evening such a success – SBS, Douglass Hanley Moir, iSUBSCRiBE, Blue Pyrenees Estate, Buzz Strategic Insights and Steel & May Tailoring.

# *official reception*



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Anyone interested in attending the reception is welcome and admission is by ticket only, as seats are limited.

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Arrangements are being made for Dr Hamlin to visit Melbourne and possibly Adelaide. Further details will be posted on our website as the arrangements are finalised.

Please accept the attached donation for the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital through the

## **HAMLIN FISTULA® RELIEF & AID FUND**

Please post to PO Box 965 Wahroonga NSW 2076

Donations of over \$2 are allowable Income Tax Deductions.

DGR 900484487 (Please print clearly)

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A suggested wording for a Bequest

**OR** Please debit the sum of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to my

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\*three digit security code on the signature strip of your credit card

Name on card

Expiry Date

Signature

### **DR HAMLIN OFFICIAL RECEPTION TICKET BOOKING FORM**

Number of tickets @ \$50 per person  
(\$51 per person for credit card and  
online payments)

Please fill in the name and payment sections of this coupon and indicate the number of tickets. Post with a cheque or fax to 02 9440 4764 if you have used the credit card option. Tickets will be mailed to the address provided. You can also book and pay at [www.fistulatrust.org](http://www.fistulatrust.org)