

Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | March 2010



DR HAMLIN'S LETTER

My Dear Friends in Australia

Again it is a great pleasure to write to you with some news from our Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa and our provincial fistula centres and some of the patients we treat.

SUNDAY'S CRY FOR HELP!

Here is picture of one such patient. Her name is Sunday, and her history is recorded in the letter we received from a missionary working in a small remote village. It was headed "A cry for help from Southern Sudan"!



Dated early December, the letter told of a 3 day labour ending in the stillbirth of her first baby but leaving her with incontinence of urine. This kind missionary overcame many obstacles to contact us and to arrange for a young girl of 17 who had hardly moved from her remote village to be taken

by road to Juba and then flown to Addis Ababa. The letter we received was touching in the extreme, with so many problems overcome.

Philip, the young man who accompanied Sunday was from the same area, but who amazingly had been in Ethiopia previously as a refugee with his family. So he was the ideal person to accompany her and to act as her interpreter when she arrived. He was a true Christian man and displayed the love of God as he sat beside her and talked to our staff. He even told us of some relatives or friends still living in Ethiopia. He lived in our hospital compound for a few days after Sunday's operation, but as soon as she was making good progress he had to leave to return home to the Sudan, where he was to join a course arranged for him by his mission.

In her convalescence, Sunday was taught to embroider, and is now doing amazing work! I see her always busy sitting on the verandah with this skill, she has learnt here! We all admire her work and are so pleased to see her smiling face. Soon we shall be arranging her flight back to Juba, which fortunately is a direct flight with no change of planes in Nairobi!

MY HEARTFELT THANKS

With such women to help as these I must once again tell you how thankful we all are here at the Hospital that you in Australia are at present our biggest and most faithful supporters!

We thank you all so much for your wonderful help which is so kind and generous and gives us all here so much

Please note: The new telephone number of the Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund is (02) 800 77 435 and the new fax number is (02) 800 77 470. The Fund's new email address is: emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au

encouragement to keep on working here – so many of you support us, either as individuals or through churches, clubs and other community groups. You have heard of the need of these women and help by raising money or sending us goods such as the wonderful shawls which you so lovingly and beautifully make. We are so grateful to you all.

The Australian Government is also playing an important part in this support. Through AusAID, the Government is helping to meet our present needs, especially through its support for the Midwifery College, and also to build up our Endowment Fund for the future of this work.

MIDWIFERY COLLEGE DEVELOPMENTS

Our Midwifery College is growing. This year's intake of 17 first year students is the highest so far, as we now have more buildings at the College and extra staff.

We are delighted that our new dean has officially been appointed – Jacqueline Bernhard. She has good qualifications and much clinical and academic experience having worked in Europe and elsewhere in Africa before coming to us. So she knows the type of conditions which confront midwives in the countryside. Sr. Annette Bennett is now the Vice Dean of the College and with Solomon Abebe (our only male midwife!) she is now in charge of the clinical outplacement programme and the deployment of our graduate midwives into the countryside, which will start later this year. Solomon is especially fitted for such a task – being an Ethiopian male, with much previous experience visiting health centres in the country.

Our midwives belong to us and we shall be responsible for them once they are sent out in pairs to work in the regional



Midwifery College staff

areas. We need to nurture them and visit them regularly as they face a big change and a new challenge – from high school student, to a midwifery student, to the countryside where they spent their childhood and school days, to now be responsible for the birth of babies and the care and welfare of mothers. A task, which is one of the most important in the world!

We believe our students are being well trained and prepared for this task, and taught what my late husband was always emphasizing and teaching: *"A mother is a family's richest possession, a being of priceless worth"*.

We had a small enjoyable ceremony at the College, followed by lunch a few weeks ago, when these new appointments were announced, and to thank Sr. Annette Bennett for her enormous task over the last 3 years – designing the College, drawing up the curriculum with her team of midwives, and supervising and teaching in the early days of the College. We now have a great team of dedicated midwives as tutors, whom I know believe we can do much to reduce the enormous maternal death rate in the countryside and the prevalence of stillborn babies and fistula injuries – "a living death" for so many young women! I am elated to see the establishment and progress of our College and to know that at last the mothers of this land are going to be cared for, by somebody skilled and well trained, with love and compassion, as each mother deserves. You in Australia have helped us in this important task and for this I am so thankful and grateful to you all.

I know that this venture is the only way to prevent the fistula disaster that so many mothers have to face and although what we so far are doing is only a drop in the ocean of need, it will spread out more and more and others will follow our example of training so that one day the villages will all have a trained midwife to look after their mothers!

We take many of our visitors to see the College and to meet the staff. To see something that is actually happening and not just a future plan is so important and many are excited and wish to help.

METU FISTULA CENTRE TAKES SHAPE

To eradicate these fistula injuries should be one that all obstetricians and midwives look forward to. But in the meantime there are many waiting to be cured!

So then, soon our fifth fistula centre will be opened in the town



New Metu Centre

of Metu - in the remote far South/west province of Illubabor, where an enormous need awaits us.

Already we are training the staff who will work there - two gynaecologists, two senior nurses, a health officer and 10 to 12 nursing aides. These key people are with us here, learning the special skills needed to care for such patients. We hope this centre will also be able to treat patients from Gambella, some of whom are refugees from the Southern Sudan, who have fled during the long years of civil war in that land.

The generosity of our Australian donors has once more enabled us to buy all the equipment needed for this new centre which will be opened in a few months time.

AISHA'S STORY

Before I leave you I must tell you about our patient Aisha Mariam. She is only 14 years old, yet so composed and mature for her age! She comes from the remote arid region of the Afar area in the East of Ethiopia. She was brought by her devoted husband. Even before her surgery she had a smile on her face



Aisha Mariam

which is rarely displayed by this race!

She had delivered a stillborn baby after 3 days of labour, and was left with this injury causing incontinence of urine. Two other Afar patients are often seen sitting on her bed or on the verandah bench with her. These two have both been abandoned by their husbands and were brought to us by Valerie Browning, whose life is spent helping the Afar woman, in total dedication to their welfare. Soon Aisha will have her catheter removed, and be sent home, as hers was not a complicated repair and her convalescence has been smooth and normal. She will be given instructions on future pregnancies, a new dress, and money for the journey home and for her faithful husband too!

Now I must leave you but I again want to express my deep gratitude to you all for your interest and loyalty to this cause, which should be on all our hearts, and one which can eventually be prevented. This is our longing as we pray to our God who has been so gracious to us in the past and we trust will continue to guide us into the future.

With my greetings and love.

DR HAMLIN RECEIVES 'THE RIGHT LIVELIHOOD AWARD'

In our December Newsletter we reported that Dr Hamlin has been awarded *'The Right Livelihood Award'*, the alternate Nobel Prize.

For the past 30 years, the Right Livelihood Award Foundation, which is apolitical and non religious, has been awarding people who have *"offered practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today"*. Each year it awards four laureates. The other recipients for 2009 were Dr David Suzuki of Japan, René Ngongo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Alyn Ware of New Zealand.

These awards were presented in the Swedish Parliament on Friday 4 December by Ms Margot Wallström, Vice President of the European Commission and Right Livelihood Council.

Due to Dr Hamlin's travel in Australia and New Zealand and other commitments she was not able to attend the award ceremony in Stockholm. However, her long serving, loyal friend and Hospital Matron Ejigayehu Wolde and Sr. Annette Bennett attended on Dr Hamlin's behalf.

HAMLIN FISTULA® RELIEF AND AID FUND

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In presenting the award Ms Wallström said:

*"Cowardice asks the question: Is it safe?
Expediency asks the question: Is it politic?
Vanity asks the question: Is it popular?
But conscience asks the question: Is it right?"*

Dr Hamlin received the award "for her fifty years dedicated to treating obstetric fistula patients, thereby restoring the health, hope and dignity of thousands of Africa's poorest women".

FUND MOVES

Over the summer period the Fund moved its office in the suburbs of Sydney, from North Turramurra to Hornsby. The Fund's new telephone number is (02) 8007 7435 and the new fax number is (02) 8007 7470. Our postal address remains unchanged. The Fund also has a new email address:

emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au

The Fund gratefully acknowledges the kindness of Mrs Betty Flick who permitted the Fund to use her North Turramurra home office facilities free of charge for more than 5 years. The Sydney Adventist Hospital ('the SAN') is now providing the Fund with office accommodation on a rent free basis in Hornsby. The Fund expresses its sincere thanks to the SAN for providing this modern facility on a rent free basis. In so doing the SAN is assisting the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital by enabling the Fund to minimise its administrative costs so that it can continue to ensure that every cent of every dollar donated to the Fund is available to support the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.



DR HAMLIN'S ADDRESS AT THE HAMLIN JUBILEE SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING

During Dr Hamlin's Australian visit last October the Fund held a Service of Thanksgiving for the Hamlin Golden Jubilee. A sound recording of the service including Dr Hamlin's address is now available on CD.

Anyone interested in purchasing a copy for \$15 (including GST and postage) can order through our website or by completing and returning the detachable slip with their payment to the Fund.

NEW WEBSITE AND MOTHER'S DAY

In the next month or so the Fund's new website will 'go live'. More details will be provided in the June newsletter. One feature of the new website will be the facility to send a donation e-card to a family member or friend. What a great idea for Mother's Day (Sunday 9th May)!

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE YOUR NEWSLETTER – BY POST OR ELECTRONICALLY?

If you currently receive your newsletter in the mail but would instead like to receive it electronically, then let us know by emailing us on emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au. The Fund realises that it is more convenient for some people to receive a 'paper newsletter' and we will gladly continue to send it to you in the usual way.

The Fund thanks David Austin roses for its continuing support of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital through the sale of the Golden Jubilee Rose during 2010. Look for the rose in a nursery near you.



Catherine's Gift

Pan MacMillan has recently re-issued *Catherine's Gift* in a 'Pan size' format. This new edition can now be purchased through our website: www.fistulatrust.org.

