

# Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | September 2008



## FROM DR CATHERINE HAMLIN AC

*My dear friends in Australia,*

Since my last letter I have spent a few weeks in England with my son Richard and his wife Diana and their family. This was a refreshing and relaxing break after the busy months of March and April travelling in Australia and New Zealand and then the Partners International Meeting in Addis Ababa in May. But it is now good to be back in Addis Ababa and to send my greetings and my thanks for your continuing support, interest and concern for our beloved injured mothers.

Our future looks bright, seeing the student midwives so enthusiastic and so diligent in their studies is very heart warming. On one national holiday recently when I was visiting Desta Mender I saw three students together in a sheltered spot under a spreading tree all with their books revising, so even on a holiday they were content to stay and study!



Dr Barbara Kwast surrounded by College students and staff

We have been fortunate to have Dr. Barbara Kwast here for a few weeks. Barbara is a doctor of midwifery with huge knowledge and teaching experience, and work of many past years in this country. So she has a great love for our midwifery project as her heart too is touched by the continuing neglect of mothers in the Ethiopian countryside - mothers reduced to sorrow, destitution and hopelessness.

We who work here and at our outreach centres have the job satisfaction of seeing so many women cured and ready to start a new life. It is wonderful also to see some who come back in late pregnancy, fearful of another obstructed labor, and with trust in our ability to see that this time they go home with a live baby.

## AusAID DIRECTOR GENERAL'S VISIT

As I mentioned in my last letter, I visited AusAID in Canberra during my Australian visit earlier this year. As many of you will know AusAID has supported the Hospital for many years, helping us with such important projects as the refurbishment of the Hospital in 1998, the building of Desta Mender in 2003 and the fistula centre at Mekelle in 2006.

So I was very pleased when in late May, Mr Davis, the Director General of AusAID, came to visit the Hospital.



This new book is a timely celebration of Dr Hamlin's life and work, coinciding with her 2009 Golden Jubilee of 50 years in Ethiopia.

Catherine's Gift will be released by Pan MacMillan in November 2008. Copies will be available through all major book retail outlets and the Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund.



Dr Hamlin and Mr Bruce Davis, Director General of AusAID

It was his first visit and I did enjoy showing him our wonderful Hospital facilities, the Desta Mender village and the new Midwifery College. We were able to arrange for Mr Davis to meet the Ethiopian Minister of

Health His Excellency Dr. Tewedros Adhanom, and to show him firsthand the work we are doing to help the poor women of Ethiopia. He seemed most impressed!

## A PATIENT'S STORY

The patient I mentioned in my last letter is now gaining weight and she is able to walk with the aid of only one stick. She was crippled from foot drop and wasted leg muscles when she arrived from our Yirgalem centre. We are fortunate to now have Professor Gordon Williams as a permanent resident in Addis Ababa. He is Dean of the new St. Paul's Medical School, which he has set up and recently opened. He has seen this poor patient. Most of her bladder was removed at the time she had terrible surgery by a surgically untrained health officer doing a caesarian section to remove a dead baby! Gordon hopes to be able to reconstruct her bladder with bowel tissue, which is preferable to doing a diversion operation.

Her partially open abdominal wound is clean and healthy although still draining copious urine. We are thankful that an x-ray of her kidneys shows they are in good condition and blood tests also confirm this. Although she is not fit yet for any major surgery, the good food and physiotherapy which she has been receiving and the love and care of our wonderful nurses has made her happy and looking like a new girl!

## A BUSY THEATRE

Our "rainy season" is well advanced now, and although a welcome season for our farmers it is for us often gloomy and quite cold! But as I write here at my desk the morning is bright and the sun shining! Usually I am in the theatre on a Thursday but we have an experienced fistula surgeon from Kenya with us for a few weeks. So he has taken my place and with our two doctors and trainees as well, they are doing a long list of operations. With our big theatre, four operating tables and a



Four operations at once

well trained and efficient theatre staff we are equipped for long operating lists.

Our lack of enough post operative beds is always a problem but our nursing staff do their best to find beds moving patients from ward to ward and are a dedicated, efficient and kind group of nurses and nurse aides with Matron Ejigayehue who holds them together, not only as an efficient matron but also as a "mother"!

We thank God for so many past blessings and help through sometimes difficult situations, and we know and believe that His spirit is here in this place and therefore the future is, I know, secure. May you feel encouraged as you read of all the projects now helping these deserving and grateful patients.

With my love

*Catherine Hamlin*

Dr. E. Catherine Hamlin



Matron Ejigayehue

*"Prevention is the best thing ... if we only had the money."*

The late Dr. Reginald Hamlin OBE

## PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICERS (PHO)

Over the past four years, generous support has enabled the Hospital to commence prevention initiatives as well as increase its capacity to treat more patients. At present there is a PHO at each of the Fistula Centres at Bahir Dah, Mekelle and Yirgalem. So far the PHOs have trained 168 Health Extension Workers to

identify and refer high risk cases for appropriate medical help. They have also trained nearly 200 Traditional Birth Attendants. Between January and March 2008, over 5,500 birthing kits have been distributed. Zonta, with assistance from AusAID, has helped provide these birthing kits.

## HAMLIN COLLEGE OF MIDWIVES

The Hamlin College of Midwives is the Hospital's most important long term preventative initiative. Annette Bennett is the Dean of the College and a midwife tutor. She writes about how the College was established in the last 18 months.

*The first intake of twelve students was hand-picked by the College staff from rural areas surrounding our regional centres of Bahir Dah (Amharra area), Mekelle (Tigre area) and Yirgalem (Southern Nations area).*

*Girls with a genuine interest in maternal health and who had successfully completed grade 12 were selected from rural schools. The College has started small but will increase each intake so that up to 60 students will be trained and accommodated at the College once it is fully operational. For the next intake in a month's time, we will include students from areas surrounding our newest centre at Harrar to the east of the country.*

*The College has developed a progressive curriculum and it is the first curriculum in the country to approach midwifery as an autonomous profession. It emphasises the 'acquisition and competency' of internationally recognised midwifery skills as well as exploring 'problem based learning'. This will enable the midwives to work confidently and autonomously in the resource poor areas of rural Ethiopia. Upon successfully completing their studies the students will receive a Bachelor in Midwifery degree. With only 1,000 qualified midwives in Ethiopia for a population of nearly 80 million, investing in midwifery training is crucial*



Annette Bennett with midwifery students

*to reducing Ethiopia's devastating maternal mortality and morbidity. With 85% of the population living in rural areas and 95% of births taking place without a medically trained person in attendance carefully selected and trained midwives are seen as a "bridge" between rural communities and health facilities.*

*Also it has become widely understood that it is very important to train the right person for the right community. The Hamlin College is not only training midwives but in collaboration with various health bureaus it will deploy the qualified midwives back to their home areas. They will be known to that community, they will speak the local language and they will have an understanding of the regional culture.*

*At the moment the College has two main buildings. There is a multi-purpose building which comprises several offices, a combined classroom/demonstration room and a combined library/computer room. The dining room and kitchen have been completed and for this year we renovated some old buildings for student accommodation and recreation.*

*The students are now well into the second term of the course. During their first term they focused on improving their English language skills. They also developed computer, sociology and communication skills. They have studied infection prevention, basic nursing skills and community health, and examined the socio-economic factors contributing to maternal health.*

*It is vital that these students gain a thorough command of English as there are no text books written in their native tongue. We have been very blessed to have two ladies volunteer who are trained in teaching English as a Second Language.*

*Over the next year the College will expand by building new classrooms and accommodation to cater for the growing student body.*

*All the College staff agree that we have a wonderful group of students. They are very enthusiastic and conscientious. It is a privilege to be working with these young women and to see them develop the skills they need to become highly trained midwives and leaders in their communities. It is our vision that all women in Ethiopia will have access to a well trained midwife and that we will see an end to the devastation of obstetric fistula.*

Annette has taken on the role of College Dean and midwifery tutor in a voluntary capacity, whilst at the same time



## HAMLIN FISTULA® RELIEF AND AID FUND

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supporting her husband, Mark, the Hospital's CEO, and raising their family of four teenage children. So she is a busy lady!

It costs \$4,000 per year to train and accommodate one midwifery student at the Hamlin College of Midwives.

### ATO EPHRAIM'S UPDATE ON LIFE AT DESTA MENDER

Our work in Desta Mender is progressing well and the women who have been trained in dairy production are now generating a good amount of income. Aside from the milk which is produced for use in the Hospital, they are also producing butter and local cheese, which they sell at wholesale prices to the staff. With this income they are covering all the production costs, paying something for their housing and making a modest profit as income.

Another five women have been trained to look after the laying chickens. From 150 chickens we are now getting 120 eggs per day and soon we will increase our flock to 450 chickens.

The women who are working in the poultry farm are also generating income towards their cost of living.

In the last month or so a small group of women have also been trained in basic home nursing, with the hope of gaining employment in a nursing home.

Thanks to funds from Australian donors the new café is taking shape. This will provide opportunities for the young Desta Mender women who have been trained in catering skills to provide hospitality services to visitors who come to Desta Mender and who use its meeting room facilities.

These developments have brought significant improvement to the outlook of these women and their hope in the future. They are no longer dependant but working towards their own future well being.



Ato Ephraim the manager at Desta Mender

### FUND ACTIVITIES

#### *Annual Public Meeting*

The Fund will be holding its annual public meeting in St Thomas' Anglican Church Hall, McLaren Street North Sydney on Thursday 13 November 2008 commencing at 8.00pm.

This will provide an opportunity for the Hospital's supporters to

hear about the latest progress and plans for the celebration of Dr Hamlin's Golden Jubilee of 50 years in Ethiopia in 2009.

We are hoping to give the meeting a particularly Ethiopian 'flavour' and to assist with planning the event it would be helpful if you could call or email the office to let us know if you intend coming.

#### *Thank you for your support*

Once again the Fund is very appreciative of the continuing support of so many individuals and community groups. These have included The Blue Mountains Crest Club, Macquarie House at The Kings School and Tara School for Girls. Ferny Grove State School ran a 'Silentathon' and a keen group of Sydney-siders were inspired to 'Walk to Somewhere Beautiful'. This they did around Sydney Harbour from the Spit Bridge to the Manly Aquarium.

The *Art for Ethiopia* show held in August was very successful. Many interested people visited The Red Door Gallery in Summer Hill and purchased works from the wide ranging collection brought together through the hard work of Sue and David Loane, Winsome Tong and David Vaughan. They even managed to obtain some works from an overseas artist, which were soon 'snapped up' by eager buyers. The Fund is very grateful to Sue and her team for their efforts, as well as Jules François who donated the use of her elegant gallery.

The *Doll Collectors Club of NSW's Annual Fair* was also very successful. It attracted many hundreds of doll making and dressing enthusiasts from around Sydney and regional areas over the weekend of 26 - 27 July. Margaret Tomlin and her Committee did a great job organising this large event and providing an excellent opportunity to promote the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

#### *Dr Hamlin Interviews*

If you missed the interviews of Dr Hamlin on Talking Heads and the Sunday programmes or would like to see them again, then go to our website and follow the links.

#### *A Walk to Beautiful*

Visit [www.fistulatrust.org](http://www.fistulatrust.org) for details of future screenings around Australia, including on the ABC's 'Four Corners' programme.



Chaltu is fifteen years old and has a double fistula. She has been incontinent of urine and bowel waste for at least three years.

After the death of her father she went to Addis Ababa to work as a domestic servant. She was raped by her employer and went back to her village without any money. She was pregnant.

She delivered a still born baby after three days in obstructed labour. The nearest Health Care Center is six hours by foot from her village. Chaltu's mother later died.

Chaltu says 'My younger brother and sisters complained about the bad smell and that they were getting sickness because of it. I cannot blame them since I know the condition and the offensive smell that I have. My neighbours helped wash my clothes and gave me food. I thought maybe if I die things might not be too hard.'

Chaltu heard about the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and started begging for the bus fare – less than AUD\$3. When she had gathered enough money, a man volunteered to escort her on her journey to Addis Ababa.

Her case is a difficult one with bad scarring. The doctors hope that they can cure Chaltu and help give one so young a new life.

The Hospital and its regional centres have treated 2,366 fistula patients in the past year.

Your donation will help young women such as Chaltu have a new life.

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

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*“Every cent of every dollar donated to the Fund is available to support the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital”*