

## January 2010 Newsletter

### An Award for Dr Hamlin The "Alternative Nobel Prize"

On Tuesday 13 October it was announced that Dr Catherine Hamlin is to be bestowed with The Right Livelihood Award 2009. This award was established in Sweden in 1980 to honour and support those offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today and is recognised as the world's premiere award for personal courage and social transformation.



**Dr Hamlin with some of her Patients**

Dr Hamlin said, "The plight of the women who come to the Hospital in Addis Ababa and its four regional centres continues to be as severe and heart-wrenching today as the plight of the first fistula patients we saw half a century ago. For this reason we continue to love and care for them, to alleviate their suffering and to cure them of their physical and psychological injuries. Increasing public awareness in the developed world has led to growing support of our work."

Dr Hamlin and her husband came to Ethiopia fifty years ago and the candle they lit then is still burning today.

### Special meeting in Addis Ababa

Mark Bennett (CEO) gave a presentation on the overall activities of the hospital and its achievements over the past 35 years. He discussed activities undertaken by the hospital and outreach centres on patient treatment and prevention.

The need for immediate action to call a halt for childbirth injuries was addressed by Dr Catherine Hamlin. She stressed the need to work on preventing obstetric fistula and the need to improve maternity health care.

Professor Gordon Williams, the Medical Director of AAFH described the work of our health officers in the outreach centres who encounter huge numbers of women suffering from fistula who have been hidden away for years. He also spoke of the action to improve maternal health through establishing an Emergency Obstetric Care Unit in Dangla Health Centre. Dangla is about an hour's drive from our outreach centre in Bahir Dar. The health officers, Ato Birhanu Member from Bahir Dar and Ato Amare Desta from Yirgalem, revealed what they actually face on their field trips to different woredas (regions) in their locality.

Sr Annette Bennett, Dean of the Midwifery College spoke of the objectives, activities and plans for the college. She stressed the need to have midwives in every village to help mothers deliver safely. She said that the dream of Dr Hamlin 50 years ago to train midwives is now being fulfilled.

## **Dangla Health Centre**

As part of its programme for the prevention of obstetric fistula, the Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia, together with Amhara Regional Health Bureau, Intra Health and USAID have built and equipped a clinic for Emergency Obstetric Care at the Dangla Health Centre. This will enable Caesarean sections to be carried out. Two health officers have been trained to perform Caesarean sections and they will be mentored and tutored by Dr Abiy.



**Dangla Health Centre**

Dangla was the chosen area for the health centre as it will be able to provide preventative measures against obstetric fistula in the more rural areas. There is a fully equipped operating theatre, a care unit where women are looked after in preparation for their fistula repair at Bahir Dar, and an ambulance in which to transport patients.

## **Medical News**

During the last nine months 1779 procedures on women with obstetric fistulae have been carried out at our main hospital and the four outreach centres.

Our new physiotherapy unit will become operational very soon. There will be a private assessment room, we will be able to provide electrotherapy treatment and it will be fully equipped to provide treatment for patients who require pre- and post-surgery treatment. It is hoped that it will help to reduce patients' stay in hospital.

## **Hamlin Midwifery College**

We are happy to announce that the Hamlin College of Midwives has achieved full accreditation from the Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Body, which is a department of the Ministry of Education.

The Hamlin College of Midwives has entered its third year and we will soon see the first team of graduates deployed into the communities from where they came.

These third year students are excited and will spend their final year focusing on research and fine-tuning their skills in basic emergency obstetric care. They will travel back to their areas for a clinical placement and to carry out a community profile.

The new intake of students for this current year has come from 5 different regions and zones of Ethiopia. Four of the students are from Metu area, where we are building our fifth outreach centre, four are from the far west in Walaga and two from the Afar Region. The Afar people are Nomadic people whose region is very under-developed. A maternity hospital is being built in the Afar region and the two Afar graduates will work in that hospital.

## Nurse Aides in Training



For many years the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital has been giving a second chance to women who have been chronically injured, helping them to regain self-worth again. One of the ways is by training them to be nurse-aides and to be able to help in the main hospital and in the outreach centres.

On the last course fifteen were trained and they can now be used as supplementary nurses helping in wards and physiotherapy departments. They have also taken basic literacy and numeracy lessons, giving them a good foundation to continue their education.

## Desta Mender (Joy Village)

We have developed a Training Curriculum which is designed to motivate and enable women to be more self-reliant so that they will be able to live outside the confines of Desta Mender. It has been approved by the Ministry of Education and other professionals. After careful screening, we have chosen and employed two adult educators to teach and mentor the 31 women who are currently residing in Desta Mender.



## Women in Training

They are W/ro Sahalitu Tefera and W/ro Tigist Aman and both have a rich experience in adult education.

Another exciting development in Desta Mender is the establishment of a self-help group involving 10 of our residents, they have called it "Hope Association". For the first time in their lives they are able to save a little money from their earnings.



Members of the "Hope Association" Group

Their plan is that as they become good enough in their work and as their savings increase, they hope to begin their own enterprise either individually or collectively in an area of their choosing and where resources are available.

## Story of a Patient from Desta Mender

Zebenay (*not her real name*) does not know how long she has been married but she clearly remembers the date of her injury. It was her 9th pregnancy and, as with the other eight babies, she was alone and in labour.

For eight days the obstructed labour continued before her family carried her in a bed to the nearest health post, which was an eight hour walking distance from her village. There she gave birth to a still-born baby and after a few days she learned she had an obstetric fistula. The family had no money to transport her to Addis, so for a year she stayed in her village.

When she finally arrived at the Fistula Hospital she had her treatment and was then taken to Desta Mender in February 2006. When her health had improved sufficiently she began to participate in the skills development training given in the village. Her choice was to train in dairy cow management. This was in February 2007.



**Zebenay**

Now her life has changed. She said, "I am a hopeful and productive part of the community where I am living". She earns a wage and lives independently in her village close to Desta Mender. She said, "Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital not only restored my health, it also supported me to start a new life, a better life, and I am capable now of helping my children".

## More Patients Stories

Adina, the 60 year old lady we heard about in our previous newsletter who had suffered her fistula for 30 years has been cured and has returned home. It was hoped that she would stay a while longer to put on more weight, but she was determined to go. She was 'over the moon with joy' and had to make a very long journey home.

Relatives who had visited her in Addis were taking her as far as Wollo in the north and there her son was meeting her. He would put her on a mule or donkey for the rest of the journey, this would possibly take 2 days.

The other little patient who was badly undernourished on her arrival has been so brave. Her bones are not good, she had been lying on the floor of her hut for 6 or 9 years before coming to us. X-rays showed almost translucent bones from lack of calcium.

However, she now spends most of her pre-operative days in physiotherapy helping to regain her strength. She has never been to school, so does not know her age, but from what her family tells her she is in her early twenties. She had been married for 2 years and with this her first pregnancy she was in labour for 3 days. Her parents took her to the nearest health clinic where they were told to take her to another, and this referral process continued to the 4th health clinic.



**Our brave little patient**

She said she knew her unborn baby had died before it was delivered. She subsequently developed a fistula and drop foot from being in labour for so long.

This clinic referred her to our centre in Bahir Dar, where she was cared for and where she stayed for two months before being strong enough to be transferred to Addis. She has been in Addis for 3 months and is having physiotherapy and being cared for until she is well enough for surgery.

She says, "I thank God that I can now walk a little, I can take a shower on my own and I can do whatever I want to on my own. Before this, my mother and father would take turns to cuddle me and clean me".

Now she is the one who encourages other patients to keep on with their physiotherapy exercises. She tells them, "Sport is good. See me as a witness. I no longer need a wheelchair, I only need one stick now. Have faith that you will be cured".

## **Outreach Centres**

For many patients who have heard of the Fistula Hospital, they may find the journey to the capital city far too much of a challenge and an expense. Four of our five planned outreach centres are open and fully operational and these are strategically placed around Ethiopia so as to enable more fistula sufferers to be able to access treatment.

It is a great thing for the women of the countryside because some of them are so poor they would never raise the money to get to Addis Ababa.

They have trained their own nurse-aides at the hospital in Addis Ababa. Some of these nurse-aides originally came from the areas where the outreach centres are, so it is sensible for young women from these areas to have the opportunity to live closer to home.



## **Bahir Dar Hamlin Fistula Centre**

This centre is located approximately 450 miles northwest of Addis Ababa and was opened in 2005. Bahir Dar is a very poor town in a beautiful place, situated on the edge of Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile.

Dr Andrew Browning is the resident doctor here and he is one of the most skilful fistula surgeons in the world. He has trained many overseas doctors and has written extensively for medical journals on Fistula Repair.

It is not uncommon for girls in Bahir Dar area to be married as young as 7 or 8. As a result of premature relations with their husbands these children suffer dreadful internal injuries, similar to injuries suffered during an obstructed birth.

The number of admissions is growing with about 10 new girls arriving each day.

## **Mekele Hamlin Fistula Centre**

Mekele is the capital of the Regional State of Tigray and is situated in the most northern part of Ethiopia. It is 465 miles from Addis Ababa.

This centre was opened in February 2006 and treats patients in the Tigray Region as well as those who travel from as far away as Afar and Amhara.

Dr Melaku Abriha is the surgeon here and he undertook his extensive training in fistula surgery with Dr Hamlin at our main hospital in Addis Ababa.

It was in this area where tens of thousands of people perished as a result of drought and famine in 1986.

Tigray region has a population of about 4.1 million, nearly a quarter being women between 15 and 49 years of age. There are about 184,000 pregnancies each year and obstetric fistulas occur in about 1.6% of cases. The Region has one obstetrician for every 1 million people and one midwife for every 33,700 people.

## **Yirgalem Hamlin Fistula Centre**

Our UK Trust has promised ongoing commitment to providing the running costs for this centre for the foreseeable future.

It was opened in November 2006 and is 200 miles from Addis Ababa.

The resident doctor is Dr Fekade Ayenachew.

Yirgalem is south of Addis Ababa in the Sidamo zone and has a population of over 14 million. The journey from Addis Ababa to Yirgalem takes about five hours by car on a road that traverses the Great Rift Valley. There are often famines in this area.

It is estimated that there could be thousands of fistula patients hidden away because they are ashamed and somehow they must be reached. The Health Officer has been looking for fistula sufferers in remote areas in the countryside to tell them of the help they can receive at Yirgalem Centre.

It is a region of many cultures and languages so the hospital staff is constantly faced with many challenges, as they speak mostly Amharic language. At any one time there may be only one or two patients from their unique tribes and these can suffer cultural isolation during their stay in hospital. Verbal communication is limited and translators for their rare dialects are not easy to find.

## **Harar Hamlin Fistula Centre**

This, the fourth of our Outreach Centres was opened in 2008 and is 315 miles from Addis Ababa. It is in the east of Ethiopia and close to the Somali border. Many patients treated here are from Somalia as well as Ethiopia.

The resident doctor is Dr Yifru Terefe. He decided to study obstetrics and gynaecology after he saw the horrendous injuries many patients suffered while he was working in a hospital near to the Sudanese border. When he did his attachment in Addis he was so impressed with what he saw that he asked if he could work there. Dr Yifru said he became a doctor because he wanted to help people. "I am using my skills to help those who need it, and that satisfies me".

## **Metu Hamlin Fistula Centre**

This centre is nearing completion and it is hoped that it will be open and accepting patients in 2010. It is 375 miles from Addis Ababa.

The roads are not good and it takes 12 hours to drive there from Addis. Metu is very remote and communication and transport is very difficult. Doctors have been visiting the area on outreach missions and they report that many young women are in desperate need of help.

Our UK Trust has offered funding for the building of this centre here at Metu, together with a Partner Trust in Holland and Women's Hope International.

## News of one of our UK Trustees

On Friday 27 November 2009 Dr Brian Hancock was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists for his work with the fistula ladies in many African countries over the past 10 years.



**Dr Brian Hancock (r) and his wife with  
Professor ARULKUMARAN**

Dr Hancock has spent a cumulative total of two and a half years in Africa since his retirement from his hospital in Manchester in 2000. This includes 18 visits to our Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

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