

Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Update | April 2012



My dear friends in Australia,

I know it is many months since I have written a letter to you and for this I am indeed sorry and apologise. Now at last I feel able to write and give you news of our work and the beloved women and girls we and you help to restore to a normal happy life! We here see this joy, as they leave for home but certainly you play a big part in bringing this joy into their shattered lives. So I thank you for this.

My time in Australia and England included a family Christmas in Shropshire with Richard and his wife Diana and four grandchildren and friends; also a 90th birthday party in Australia for my elder sister and meeting my scattered family in NSW and Queensland. So, it involved many lovely country drives on Australia's perfect roads and through its beautiful countryside! But partly I was involved with many decisions and management changes pending here at our hospital and our other institutions in Ethiopia. Now these are settled and I write with a thankful heart to the many friends and loyal staff here and abroad who have supported me throughout this trying period and to our loving and unchanging God who loves our patients and is faithful and eternal.

Our new Board is in place and we have already had our first meeting. Our new CEO will soon be able to join us and to take over from our departing CEO.

For me to be back in my own home again and working in the hospital with a loyal staff is indeed wonderful. I am thankful that my son Richard, also a Trustee, is with me and has been his usual great support. Skype is a wonderful invention and keeps us all in touch!

The hospital is busy and beds are fully occupied. Our three permanent fistula surgeons are working hard and doing excellent work as well in training others, some from our own Ethiopian

medical schools, to know how to repair these injuries. You will be pleased to know that our fifth and most recently opened fistula centre in Metu is now busy and helping many women in that far off province of Illubabor. So all this is good news for you in Australia as you kindly continue to support us.

Last Thursday I operated on one woman sent up to Addis from Metu – a precious mother with five living children left at home in the care of their father. It was quite a difficult repair but with Mamite, my perfect surgical assistant helping me, it went well! The woman wanted to be sterilized as five children was quite enough for her and she was still young and would surely have had more and risked her life next time.

Our five provincial Fistula Centres are working well – in some there are even a few mattresses on the floor due to overcrowding. We plan to build a small additional ward at Yirgalem to take ten extra beds.

You would be excited and pleased to see two women lying in our maternity ward, a ten-bed ward we keep for previous patients who come back to us pregnant after having had a fistula repair operation. We instruct all patients going home to get to the nearest country hospital to deliver again if they get pregnant. Two of these came back here, both with twins and were safely delivered, each with a boy and a girl!

The two mothers are now lying in the ward with two lovely babies in cots beside each bed, so each mother has made up for the one they lost. Their happiness is great and ours is too. See images of these beautiful mothers on the next page.



Pictured here, a mother of five from the country's southwest will go home to her family, cured.



Now I must give you some special news of the great privilege I had of meeting the Queen in Australia in October. This invitation came from the Governor-General of Australia who also most kindly asked me to stay with her as her guest in Canberra and to join 35 others for lunch with the Queen on Sunday 23rd October which as you can imagine was a most exciting and wonderful occasion. I spent Saturday night in the guest house of Government House where I was surprised to be joined by the Governor-General and her husband. This was because the Queen and her entourage had fully occupied the main residence at Yarralumla. So I was privileged to have breakfast with the Governor-General and her husband next morning – an enjoyable and memorable breakfast occasion.

I had hoped I might have been able to attend church with the Queen, but it was evidently a very small church and only with room for the official party and some of the usual congregation. Instead, I was able to walk about the beautiful gardens of Government House and enjoy the sweeping lawns, huge trees and the mass of flowering azaleas and rhododendrons, still in spring glory. The lunch was at one-thirty and we were all assembled first and then lined up to go in one by one to be introduced to the royal party, flanked by the Governor-General and her husband. The Queen looked relaxed and happy in a pale yellow outfit. So with my stick in my left hand I curtsied and shook hands as she asked me how the work of our hospitals in Ethiopia was progressing. Then I moved on to speak to the Duke of Edinburgh who was easy to talk to and we mentioned meeting in Edinburgh a few years ago when he was chancellor of that university.

After we had all been introduced we were photographed as a group in all about 44 people, with the Queen and Duke in the centre, before going into the dining room for lunch. We were all seated at one long table glittering with silver and cut glass and flowers. I could see the Queen easily as she was on the other side but further down the table. It was a relaxed meal and I had two interesting men on either side – one a headmaster of a school for disadvantaged boys in Melbourne that he had founded himself. The other, a lawyer, but he had a pretty woman on his other side so mostly concentrated on talking to her.

After the meal we all went for a coffee into a big drawing room where I was able to have five minutes alone with the Queen! She asked lots of questions and then we talked about the visit of

Princess Anne to the Hospital in Addis a few years ago. She also remembered meeting Reg and me in 1965 when she was on a state visit to Ethiopia. She had personally decorated my husband with an OBE medal in the British Embassy residence.

I left some interesting photos with the Governor-General to be given to the Queen later; one particularly lovely one shows her stroking the nose of a big black stallion that she had given to the Emperor. He was standing in the background smiling, as he shared her love of horses. I received a nice letter from Buckingham Palace a few weeks later from the Queen's personal secretary thanking me and saying the photos would be put in the Palace library.

I met some of her ladies-in-waiting over coffee and had a nice relaxed conversation with two of them sitting together on a large sofa. In fact they took me over to talk to the Queen and possibly were responsible for seeing that eventually the photos reached her. So this whole day was one I shall never forget and which I greatly enjoyed.

Now I must write a few words about Desta Mender and our Midwifery College, both bringing hope to many women. We have a new manager at Desta Mender now, a young woman with much business experience. She is ideal to look after our permanent residents there and others who wish to move out and use the training they have received to set up a small business, perhaps sewing or running a café (four already run a café 4km from our site). Some run a dairy that was originally financed by our Dutch Trust. All this is exciting and we are confident will succeed in the capable hands of our new manager. I know you will be interested in hearing more in our next newsletter.

The Midwifery College is of course our flagship for prevention of these tragic fistula injuries and we are excited by what we hear from the already deployed graduate midwives in the provinces. It is a wonderful achievement to see and I am in awe of the good work being done. Be assured that our College is the hope for the future and already bringing care and comfort to women in childbirth in the country.

We are a multifaceted organisation and it is good to know so many people and partners support us. Just over a week ago we had a visit from 25 delegates from the United Nations, mostly based in New York and Addis Ababa. After their tour of the

hospital we gave them a presentation about our many years of growth and also a summary of the challenges we have had to face in the last year. One of our Trustees gave a talk to our UN guests which I will share with you here in shortened form to reassure you of our ongoing mission.

"In the late 1980s Mikhail Gorbachev used two Russian words to summarise the reforms required in his country: Glasnost 'Openness' and Perestroika 'Restructuring!'"

"Addis Ababa like any big city in the world has its rumours. One circulating is that Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia (HFE) Board has political issues that are affecting service delivery. Openness about the truth is good for any institution provided it does not unnecessarily name individuals in a discourteous manner. Restructuring has been an obligatory and opportune outcome from facing the challenges of the recent months."

"In May 2009 a senior manager of HFE, without Board authorization, stated to the Chair of an independent Trust in Europe that supports our work, that 'Unless our Foreign Partner Trusts share HFE's entire [Christian] Ethos & Values they cannot be Partners of HFE Trust, but may only be donors.' "

"You may know that Dr Hamlin, as documented in her book 'The Hospital by the River', occasionally mentions her Christian faith as a motivational factor for her and her late husband to come to Ethiopia and start the work of fistula healing and prevention. It is one thing to have a faith, but quite another to make it a condition of support for the work of this Trust. There are many with Christian faith, both Ethiopian Orthodox and Protestant working for HFE; others with us are of the Islamic faith and others of no particular religious belief. So this is not a Christian Hospital but it contains many Christians. We respect equally all those who support us or work here, of any faith or none. Sadly last year this became an issue due to the 2009 statement being revived in a stronger form. This attitude demoted the status of our loyal secular or semi-religious Trusts and almost caused the loss of their support. This religious bias was out of character with the original ethic of this institution, which, a bit like your organization the United Nations, consists of a multi-faceted, multi-ethnic and multi-religious community. It requires diplomacy and sensitivity to maintain such an organization, but if well managed, its variety gives it elegance and strength."

"Unfortunately, this religious bias split the Board and became, for some, a matter of personal allegiance to individuals rather than care for the overall good of our service to the women of Ethiopia. Over the months this also affected some members of our overseas Trusts outside mainland Europe. We knew this bias must be resisted. In summary, Dr. Hamlin using her authority as

Co-Founder of HFE was obliged to ask for the resignation of several Trustees and some senior managers. To restore the integrity of the Board she has recruited new Trustees: three Ethiopian doctors and one from the Netherlands, experienced professionals in their fields and in Board work or hospital management."

"These are: Professor Kebede, Cardiologist and Director of Landmark Private Hospital, Addis Ababa; Dr. Lia Tadesse, Gynaecologist and Vice Provost for Medical Services St Paul Hospital Millennium Medical College, Addis Ababa; Dr Ruth Leekassa, Consultant Dermatologist at Rank Specialised Higher Clinic in Addis Ababa and experienced hospital Trustee; Dr Pieter-Joep Huige, Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Pharmacy from the Netherlands, who has worked in Senior Management with Eli Lilly for many years. These four are our new, valued Board members, along with former member Mr. Richard Hamlin."

"Finally, I am pleased to mention that HFE now has a CEO-elect, Mrs. Philippa Robertson, chosen from a short-list for a six-month interim contract, pending wider recruitment if necessary. By chance she is, like Dr Hamlin, an Australian and brings a strong CV to the post, including two Masters Degrees and certificates in Tropical Medicine and in Business Negotiation. She is also a registered nurse and midwife. She is highly literate, multilingual, and significantly has worked for 11 years in Sudan, five years in Kenya, also four years in southern Ethiopia in the early 1980s. She was an effective fundraiser for HFE in the late 1990s."

"We have had a difficult year, but this institution and especially its spirit of tender care for patients have been worth fighting for; we are recovering from this traumatic era and we shall prevail for the sake of our patients, our staff and for the lady, Dr Hamlin, who inspired and still inspires it. The ethos of this place will again truly be 'A Walk to Beautiful', just as its Founder has already personally demonstrated."

I will finish on a note of hope and confidence in the future of our work; work for patients that need such tenderness and care from all who work here. Their suffering is forever before me and I know you too are concerned and are helping us to bring new life to a despairing one. Thank you for your help, concern and compassion.

We have just celebrated Easter here, the greatest festival in the Ethiopian Orthodox church. Our many staff members, both of the Christian faith or otherwise, join me in sending their love this Easter time and thank you for being partners in their work.

With love from





NEW CEO ANNOUNCED FOR HAMLIN FISTULA ETHIOPIA

We are very pleased to announce that the Board of Directors of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia has appointed a new Chief Executive Officer. Pippa Robertson is an Australian midwife with a Masters in International Development and a Masters in Law. She has many years' experience working in Africa in various roles with the United Nations, most recently working in South Sudan with the United Nations Mission (UNMISS) as a Recovery, Reintegration and Peace Building Officer in the region of the country bordering Ethiopia.

"We are delighted to welcome Pippa to the Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia team. She's a gift from God!" says Dr Hamlin.

Pippa will take over the role starting in April, as our departing CEO, Australian hospital administrator Mark Bennett, leaves Ethiopia after almost five years with Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia. Mark and his wife Annette both made an enormous contribution to the growth of the organisation over the last few years and we wish them all the best on their next mission.

MARATHON MIDWIFE!

Australian midwife Bernadette Lack is running a marathon to raise funds for the Hamlin College of Midwives. But it's not your average marathon. It's a gruelling 45km run called the Great Ocean Road Marathon from Lorne to Apollo Bay in Victoria.

And Bernadette is not your average midwife. She works with the Remote Outreach Midwife Central Team, providing midwifery services to eleven remote central Australian communities up to 700km out of Alice Springs. Bernadette is studying for her Masters in Public Health and is the President of the Australian College of Midwives, Northern Territory. She is also a respite care foster mum. Originally studying to be a sports psychologist, Bernadette read *Hospital by the River* several years ago and was so inspired by the Hamlin story that she switched to midwifery.

With a strict training schedule for the marathon, Bernadette uses the outback as her training ground, running on sandy red dirt roads and literally dodging kangaroos and swollen rivers.

Her goal is to raise \$20,000 to fund the training of five Ethiopian midwives at the Hamlin College of Midwives in Addis Ababa. With fundraising already at over \$9,000 she's confident that she can reach this goal.

"When I am training I just keep remembering that every minute, somewhere in the world, a woman dies in childbirth. That keeps me going. If I can fund the training of five or more local midwives in Ethiopia, I can help change that statistic," says Bernadette.

The race will be run on 20 May 2012. We will be updating supporters on Bernadette's progress on the Hamlin Fistula Facebook page at facebook.com/DrCatherineHamlin.



MAKE A DONATION

To donate to Bernadette's run, visit her fundraising page at everydayhero.com.au/bernadette_lack
Every cent goes to the Hamlin College of Midwives.

Hamlin Fistula goes social

Keep up to date on a more regular basis by 'liking' the Hamlin Fistula Facebook page at facebook.com/DrCatherineHamlin. You can help create awareness of obstetric fistula in Ethiopia by sharing our Facebook page with your networks.



You can even follow Dr Hamlin herself on Twitter! Dr Hamlin tweets about the surgical cases she is working on, general news at the hospital and fundraising details. Her Twitter handle is [@DrCHamlin](https://twitter.com/DrCHamlin)



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