

Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | December 2006



FROM DR CATHERINE HAMLIN AC

Dear Friends in Australia,

This is a special letter to wish you all a very happy Christmas, and much joy, health and peace in the new Year.

ETHIOPIAN CHRISTMAS

Christmas here in the Ethiopian Church calendar is celebrated on the 7th January and very different from the one you will be celebrating on the 25th December. Here it varies, depending on where you live, but it is always a family gathering.

In Addis Ababa some of our western customs are being adopted, such as a Christmas tree (usually freshly felled). Some shops may be decorated, presents bought and given to children and adults, and always a special feast! But it is essentially a Christian festival, unfortunately slowly becoming commercialised.

In the countryside, again, it is always a Christian celebration, when most of the peasant community go to the church, often the older people are there all night, others in the very early morning – to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and God. Children minding the animals on the hills and in the fields will hear the chanting and singing coming from the churches as the shepherds of old heard the angels celebrating the birth of the saviour. Then later in the day there will be special bread prepared. The little Tukul or house will be strewn with freshly cut green grass and if new clothes can be afforded these will be distributed mostly to the children at the main meal of the day, when meat or chicken, as a treat may be served.

Our poor fistula women would not be able to be at this family

celebration – certainly too, she would not be able to go to church with urine leaking as this would be considered unclean and she herself would also feel shame. A kind person may bring her a special meal on this day, but it would be a sad and lonely day for her, as she would not join others from the village. So her sense of isolation would be extreme.

Still, there are others who would not even know it was a special day, as their isolation has been for so long and so difficult that every day is the same long weary one to be endured.

At our Hospital, Christmas also is celebrated on 7th January. The ward is decorated with flowers and greenery, and a few decorations. Two cloth pictures of nativity scenes, donated by the World Vision Women's club of Australia are placed on our Main ward nurses station. They are still as good as new and greatly appreciated by all.

Last year we had Mark and Annette Bennett's children help with the giving out of the presents and they were wonderful. We hope to do the same again this year.



Some cured patients. They are wrapped in some of the wonderful knitted shawls that have been sent to us from Australia.

PREVENTION AND MIDWIFERY TRAINING SCHOOL

There is much on our minds at present, especially concerning the prevention of fistula injuries and the tragic loss of so many mothers and babies.

As you will know, about 8,000 women in Ethiopia every year suffer an obstetric fistula. A recent survey in rural Ethiopia revealed that at least 40,000 women have had the problem for some time. Even with our outreach Hospitals we can only treat, at present, about 1,800 per year.

We are determined to try and stem this tide of suffering. The Fistula Hospital is already participating in safe-motherhood teaching programs, and constantly raising awareness of the problem.

Now we are planning to implement an ambitious intensive training program in midwifery. We will do this as soon as possible. Extra funds will have to be raised which we will use first for the training of suitable girls from the countryside. They will learn the skills of midwifery by having a planned curriculum and qualify with suitable certification approved by the Ethiopian Health Ministry.

The initial need is to find a place where training can be done. We are looking at plans to set up a training centre at Desta Mender.

As an alternative we are negotiating to obtain extra land situated below the Addis Ababa hospital towards the river. There is already a building on the land that we could use and renovate.

Our overall objective is to have trained midwives, employed by the Hospital and working under supervision from each of our five "Fistula Centres". This is a big long-term project, it will be costly and take some years before benefits are seen.

RESIDENT DOCTOR APPOINTED TO MEKELLE CENTRE

On the 1st October we welcomed Dr Melaku to work at our Mekelle Centre.

However he is with us for a month at Addis Ababa doing an advanced training course in fistula surgery, so that he will be well equipped to run our centre at Mekelle.

Dr Melaku is an Obstetrician and gynaecologist who has been working as the medical director of Adigrat Hospital, which is a



Dr Melaku, with Dr Mulu and Dr Catherine Hamlin AC

small regional hospital to the North of Mekelle.

He has had many years experience and the regional health authorities were happy to allow him this opportunity as he will be staying in the region, and continue to be a resource for them. Dr Melaku has a wife and children and they have just bought a house in Mekelle! The children will also be able to go to a better school than was available for them at Adigrat.

We have also employed a health officer and will begin spreading information about obstetric fistula throughout the countryside. We will then have local organisations able to spread the word and locate and transport patients.

Our Australian fund has agreed to provide the vehicles now needed for the doctor to visit more remote areas.

PATIENTS NOW COMING FROM SOMALIA

We almost need a Somali interpreter as we have so many patients now coming from that war torn country in the south. They usually arrive in groups of 6-8 at a time.

These women often have very shocking injuries. Some have scarring from the severe type of circumcision that is practiced in that country, but fortunately is not the case in Ethiopia.

Once again I send all our friends in Australia my warmest greetings and my love especially those who have been to visit us this year, we have all enjoyed meeting you here at the Hospital and hope many more of you will visit us next year.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Catherine Hamlin".

Catherine Hamlin



Somali Patients at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

FROM THE CEO – MARK BENNETT

MORE PATIENTS ARRIVING..



Mark and Annette Bennett and their children, Alleytia, Dylan, Lewis and Martin

We continue to have increasing numbers of patients arriving for surgery. This is possibly due to the higher profile of the Hospital and greater communication within the country. One of the Ethiopian radio stations has been used to create awareness of both the causes and means to obtain medical assistance.

The hospital at Addis Ababa was full throughout the wet

season (which is usually the slack time) and extra patients have had to go to Desta Menda until a bed became available. During this time the patients were able to be prepared and were able to have lessons in literacy and handicrafts.

THE YIRGALEM CENTRE

Our centre at Yirgalem was opened in November and had already been used for a number of operations prior to that. Because the local people do not know that the Centre is functioning existing community organisations are locating patients and bringing them to the hospital for treatment. This centre was built with the assistance of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission and the Norwegian Government agency NORAD. We are also investigating the possibility of a Norwegian Doctor working at the centre in 2007. Our Partner Organisation in England has agreed to provide the funding needed to cover the running costs of this centre.

THE HARER AND METU HAMLIN FISTULA CENTRES.

Our planned centre at Harar will be built with funds from our USA partners, and is planned to commence construction work in February 2007.

The construction of our fifth centre will be at Metu, west of Addis Ababa, and is planned to commence late 2007.

Annette the children and I wish you all a peaceful Christmas and happy New Year.

Mark Bennett

FROM DR ANDREW BROWNING AT BAHR DAR



Dr Andrew Browning, Stephanie and William

The Bahr Dar centre has treated 500 patients since it was opened in January 2006. Almost all of the patients have been cured and gone home, very happy, to their families. Many had been made aware of our Hospital by Partner NGO's working with USAID. One patient made a long journey back to us recently after 6 months, just to thank us.

The nursing aides accommodation house is now finished. It looks great and the nursing aides have moved in with great joy. We are planning to build a nice garden around it when time permits.

We have employed 3 teachers to teach all the patients. They learn literacy, numeracy, health hygiene, how they got a fistula and how to prevent it next time. As well we try to offer spiritual hope and comfort by teaching some Bible stories and wonderful friendship.

I travel to Uganda twice a year and at the hospital in Uganda last time we had 74 patients who had arrived for treatment as well as 11 for training. Stephanie and William are faring well. They were able to have a well deserved break, and travelled to South Africa with me, where I presented a paper to the International Society of Urology, on new techniques developed with operations at the Bahr Dar Hamlin Fistula centre.

We are so thankful that, we can see the results of the hard work in the faces of the cured fistula patients.

Stephanie, William and I wish all our supporters our love this Christmas.

Andrew Browning

RUTH KENNEDY – AUSTRALIA VISIT



Ruth Kennedy with Dr Gary Skyes at the Annual meeting

Some of you will have had the privilege of meeting Sister Ruth Kennedy. For those who have not met her, she is the wheels behind the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital's Public face.

Ruth is a trained nursing sister and a midwife. Her title is Liaison/Publicity Officer and she has an extraordinary knowledge of the problems facing young pregnant women in Ethiopia and in the way in which the fistula Hospital is able to help them. Ruth, (as she likes to be called) visited Australia in October this year, visiting Sydney, speaking at various meetings in many places.

She also had radio interviews and spoke at the Hamlin Fistula Welfare and Research Ltd Annual General Meeting and spoke at a meeting of doctors, midwives and health workers at one of Sydney's larger Hospitals. She also had an opportunity to do a Sydney Harbour Bridge Climb.

Her message from Ethiopia was simple, they must train more midwives to help prevent obstetric fistula occurring. The benefits are obvious, firstly it helps reduce the incidence of the obstetric fistula injuries; which in turn reduces the number of women needing fistula surgery; and it will save the life of many mothers and unborn babies.

FISTULA CENTRE IN THE CONGO

Over the last few years the Fistula Hospital's Dr Ambaye and a medical team have been going to the Congo to do fistula surgery. This prompted five separate groups of doctors from the Congo to come to the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa for training in fistula surgery. Now a Norwegian Christian Group has decided to fund the cost of setting up a Fistula Centre in the Panzi. It will become a training centre in the Congo for fistula surgery. Training will be in French, which will be a bonus in that part of Africa.

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