



HAMLIN  
FISTULA  
AUSTRALIA

# Treatment, prevention and raising awareness of obstetric fistulas

CHRISTMAS 2022

## Wonderful Saviour

*"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).*

Dear Friends,

Christmas is a special time for us Christians because our Lord came to this world to save us from our sins and invite us to His kingdom. This saviour is called 'wonderful' because no one is comparable to Him by any measure and standard. He touched and changed the lives of millions of human beings through his generosity and love. His love is overflowing each day refilling us with joy and true fulfillment. He is indeed the Prince of Peace that governs our individual lives, families and nations if we surrender to Him.

Having worked with Catherine Hamlin while she was still with us, I knew that she was inspired by the Lord Jesus Christ to become a compassionate and loving servant of God. She lived a selfless life following the example of Jesus and became a blessing to thousands of Ethiopian women who suffered the debilitating conditions of fistula. She has also inspired hundreds of people who decided to help vulnerable people. Her legacy will continue for generations to come until fistula is eradicated and women are empowered to live a fulfilled life. We want to follow the footsteps of Christ, as Catherine did, and increase our impact for women with childbirth injuries. Thank you for your support for this great cause ushered by Catherine Hamlin.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year 2023. God bless you all!

Tesfaye Mamo  
Chief Executive Officer  
Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia



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Special thanks to everyone who provided photographs for this newsletter.



# Partners meet in person



After the disruption of the past few years, it was a great joy for Denis Pontin (above) and David Knox (representing the Hamlin Fistula Australia Board) along with Doug Marr (Executive Officer of HFA) to travel to Ethiopia together for the Partners International Meeting (PIM), in July this year. They were pleased to meet the new Chair of the Board of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia Dr Mengistu Asnake, and renew their long friendship with Tesfaye Mamo, Chief Executive Officer of the hospital.

The CEO highlighted the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine which has caused significant economic pressures, including severe supply chain issues and the civil unrest in Ethiopia, particularly in northern Ethiopia, which has impacted on the staff at Mekelle in Tigray and the health centres across the area.

Despite these hurdles, Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia (HFE) has continued to increase the number of patients who receive surgical treatment with the highest number of surgeries performed in at least 15 years. The enthusiasm of the medical staff at the PIM was very noticeable and the surgeons, other clinical staff and all nurses and staff have enabled HFE to deliver all the core objectives in the plan which were set for 2021/2.

The presentation by the surgeons from each regional hospital at the PIM was informative and challenging. Although the hospital focuses on fistula treatment there is a chronic need to



Tesfaye Mamo CEO and Dr Tadelech Shiferaw at Hamlin Midwives College for the July Graduation Ceremony



Each Partner representative was given a tree to plant at the Midwives College and David Knox was very happy with his!

treat Pelvic Organ Prolapse (Stages 3 and 4) which is just as debilitating as a fistula for the young women presenting at the hospitals. The surgery to repair these horrific prolapses was wholeheartedly supported by all present, especially as the women were not able to get treatment at a government hospital. This presentation brought home the positive, transformational impact that the work has on the lives of so many women. Denis visited Harrar and saw girls from as young as 18 and no older than 28 being treated for Stage 3 or 4 prolapse due to the hard physical work they do each day, and the lack of good nutrition. The surgery was life-changing for them.



Though Dr Catherine has passed away, her memory still colours every part of the work. Here she is, watching over the work at Desta Mender

## News from the Midwives' College

Denis, David and Doug attended the graduation ceremony for the 2022 intake at the Hamlin College of Midwives. The expansion of the Midwives College to include Masters' students began in 2021 and the plans to expand the educational facilities at the College to enable it to be accredited as a high-level tertiary College were discussed. The Board of HFA has agreed to fund Stage 1 of the expansion of the College. This funding will go towards significant building work which will include a new dormitory for up to 90 students in the MSc program, two lecture halls, a new two storey library and remodelling the existing library, a new cafeteria and kitchen as well as a student café and new kitchen extension. Large scale landscape works will be required including access roads, and removal of asbestos clad buildings as well as new security fencing to protect the students and staff from hyenas.



# Rehabilitation

**R**ehabilitation and reintegration are fundamental to the Hamlin model of care and continues to be provided across the organisation. At Desta Mender Rehabilitation Centre there is a program with 75 ex-patients learning a range of life skills. Stage 1 of the expansion program includes a new training centre and a sports field on the paddock near the Juniper Café for students, rehabilitation participants and the local community to enjoy.

In partnership with Women's Hope International (WHI) Desta Mender has delivered a new Women Empowerment Program for the last two years with trainee numbers now over 70 for each intake. It is planned to continue this programme in 2022/23 with three intakes of over 70 patients each across the year. The feedback from ex-patients has been very positive and the project truly life changing for many. Trainees have received practical training in catering and agricultural processing, vegetable farming, poultry farming and pottery.

The HFE team has developed a single standardised assessment form which is being used at all HFE centres to determine patient requirements for rehabilitation and reintegration support. This collects patient level information regarding their needs at admission to the hospital and prior to discharge. This will provide a rich source of information for the future configuration of rehabilitation and reintegration services across all centres

and ensure that those patients in most need are prioritised. The Operational Plan for 2021/22 was ambitious. However, HFE managed to double the number of surgical operations to 2,475 (excluding the Mekelle Hospital in Tigray) with 2,584 operations undertaken. This represented a 65% increase on the previous year. The cost of living has impacted Ethiopia and the staff of the Fistula Hospital. Inflation is high. The CEO and his Executive have invested in staff development and improved remuneration, particularly for the lowest paid and established a new living wage.

Denis Pontin reflected on his visit to Ethiopia. "I have visited the hospitals and Midwives' College and the health centres in remote locations where Hamlin Midwives are deployed over the last decade," he said. "When Catherine passed away I was naturally nervous as to how the government appointed Ethiopian Board of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia would respond to the challenge of continuing the work begun by Drs Reg and Catherine Hamlin. This year I have visited the hospital twice and have been so impressed with the work that is being done. Tesfaye Mamo is a strong Christian and his Christian beliefs shape the culture of HFE as Catherine's did when she was managing the staff. The majority of the executive team are also practising Christians and although the hospital welcomes all faiths, the credo that Reg and Catherine Hamlin had to minister to the poor and outcast with grace and

love through their medical skills and compassion is still evident.

We were all were impressed with the engagement of the staff, particularly the surgeons, in the challenges faced in Ethiopia. There are now around 118 million people in Ethiopia and only about half the births occur with any medical or midwife assistance. Obstructive labour and prolapse are the cause of so much suffering for the women of Ethiopia and through the Hamlin Ethiopian hospitals and midwives as well as the rehabilitation programs at Desta Mender, the women find hope and are restored to a quality of life that was lost without the intervention of Hamlin Fistula.

Due to the challenges of the terrain, poverty, poor nutrition and lack of medical facilities to adequately meet the needs of women in Ethiopia, the work of Hamlin Ethiopia is vital in reaching the women who are at risk or who have suffered birth injuries through lack of medical intervention. The MSc program will provide training to midwives that will allow them to do a Caesarean section when there is no other option to save the baby of a woman in restrictive labour. The funding of the expansion of the Midwives' College and improvements at Desta Mender are a vital part of the continued fight to eradicate fistulas in Ethiopia. I am so proud to be part of this work and be able to see the money given by our donors used to make a difference in the lives of the women of Ethiopia."



One of the Dutch Partners in Ministry was made welcome at the main hospital



Desta Mender





One of the last photos of Dr Hamlin with students of the College of Midwives

## Bethel's dream

**B**ethel Fikiru is a third-year student at the Hamlin College of Midwives. Originally from Gore in the Oromia region, she was encouraged to apply to the College by her father.

While she loves everything about her life at the College, she particularly likes the way teaching and learning dovetail together. "I really admire the instructors' relentless effort both in nurturing students to acquire knowledge in theoretical classes, and then transfer those skills as clinical practices at the health institutions where the students are assigned for clinical attachment," she said. "The instructors at the College give all they have to make us understand the lessons." Another aspect she loves is the safe environment of the College. "There is good security for female students at the College, and it is always good to learn in a secure environment," she said. Bethel dreams of working towards eradicating fistula from Ethiopia. "I am

looking forward to fighting maternal, infant and child mortality and morbidity with the knowledge and skills I have gained from my time at the College," she said.

Here in Australia, we can join Bethel's dream of eradicating fistula in Ethiopia. After all, it was Reg and Catherine Hamlin's dream too! We can be a part of that great aim by making a donation this Christmas. With the building work due to begin next year, donations are still needed to expand the College of Midwives to become a greater beacon of light and hope than it is already. Who knows? We may even become part of the bigger dream held by the beloved *Emaye*, Dr Catherine Hamlin, to eradicate fistula from all of Africa.

From everyone at Hamlin Fistula Australia, a happy and blessed Christmas to you all.

