



Photo: Dr Solomon Abebe with Dr David Knox

Winter 2026 News

Introducing Dr Solomon Abebe

is not just a medical condition, it is a devastating injury that affects every facet of a woman's life; her health, her confidence, her place in society, and her future. To be part of an organisation that, in the spirit of Dr. Hamlin, not only provides world-class treatment but also restores hope and opportunity is incredibly meaningful to me.

Dr Solomon Abebe was appointed General Manager of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia (HFE). On the 5th of January 2026.

He brings extensive leadership experience across international development and public health, including senior roles with local and international NGOs and the United Nations. He was named one of the 10 World Maternal Health Young Champions by the Harvard School of Public Health and the Institute of International Education. He has a BA in Sociology, MA degrees in Management and International Relations, a PhD in Development Studies and is a published author, with two novels released in both Amharic and English.

We asked him why he wanted to work with Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia

Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia represents the pinnacle of compassionate, high-quality, and holistic care for marginalised women. For me, joining Hamlin is deeply personal. I was drawn to the organisation's unwavering commitment to restoring the dignity of women, a mission that beautifully upholds the incredible legacy of Dr. Catherine and Dr. Reginald Hamlin. Obstetric fistula

Dr Abebe is aware that Hamlin's link to Australia is important

The link to Australia is absolutely critical and central to the identity, mission, and ongoing success of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia. Australia represents not only our origins through the pioneering vision of Dr. Catherine and Dr. Reginald Hamlin, but also our primary source of unwavering support, funding, and independent review. This profound, long-term partnership, made possible by generous donors via Hamlin Fistula Australia, enables HFE to deliver our meaningful, exclusive, and complex clinical and operational programs. Our progress is only possible through the sustained commitment and solidarity of our Australian partners.

My primary plan to keep Hamlin growing is to keep the legacy of Drs. Catherine and Reg Hamlin glowing, and that means reaching for more lives. My first priority is to honour and sustain their legacy, ensuring that compassion and clinical excellence, the essence of Hamlin, remain at the heart of everything we do.

Second, I am focused on building systems that modernize the organisation and make it fit for the future, without losing our foundational compassionate essence. This means building on the strengths of the organisation and our people so that we are well placed for the future. By becoming more resilient and more efficient, we will be better able to reach every woman who needs our care.

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Finally, I intend to keep and grow our partnerships. My focus is on expanding our impact, particularly through prevention and early treatment, so that fewer women suffer childbirth injuries in the first place.

My deepest message to Australian donors is one of profound gratitude and solidarity. Your boundless generosity is not merely funding a charity; it is the vital force that allows us to function, to innovate, and, most importantly, to rescue the lives and restore the dignity of countless marginalised women.

Every woman we treat is a life completely transformed, a testament to your deep compassion and the enduring power of the Hamlin legacy that you uphold. With your unwavering support, we are bridging the cruel gap between hope and reality here in Ethiopia. Thank you for standing in true solidarity with us on this sacred journey to forever eliminate the horrific suffering of obstetric fistula. You are turning a tragedy that should never happen; the devastation of birth injury following what should be life's most joyful moment; into a triumph of human kindness. Thank you for keeping Catherine and Reg's mission alive and glowing.

Dr Melaku from Mekelle.
Read his full story on the back page.



Travels with David

Dr David Knox is an Australian obstetrician/gynaecologist. He is a nephew of Dr Catherine Hamlin and a board member for Hamlin Fistula Australia. For many years, he has regularly visited Hamlin Fistula in Addis Ababa and other regional centres, has contributed, and has also benefitted from his time there. He recently spent some time visiting the hospital, the College of Midwives and Desta Menter, the hospital's rehabilitation centre, and can now update us on how things are going with the building work, the administration and the training of doctors in their quest to fulfill Dr Catherine Hamlin's dream or eradicating fistula in Ethiopia.

I was pleased to be there while Dr Andrew Browning, an Australian fistula surgeon from the Barbara May Foundation was also visiting. Andrew is a very skilled fistula surgeon and was there to train the Hamlin doctors in some new techniques which allow a higher success rate with vaginal repair of fistulas. His nurse Noella from Tanzania was also with him. The doctors being trained were local, national and international!

Present at the training were Drs Bitou, Binyam, Yeshineh, and Tigist from Addis Ababa; Dr Melaku from Mekelle,



Dr Melaku watching
Dr Browning

Dr Wonda from Yirgalem and Dr Youssef from Eastern Sudan... a junior trainee from the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO). There were also two doctors from Tigray who returned home on the first day due to fears of terrorism! It was great to have Dr Youssef from Sudan. He was doing fistula surgery training with FIGO but this had to be cut short as he was unable to extend his visa. He was very happy with his experience at the hospital. All the Hamlin surgeons were appreciative of Andrew's input and were keen for this to continue.

I also had the opportunity to have several conversations with the new General Manager, Dr Solomon Abebe. He impressed me as being very humble, open and approachable, and I believe he is an excellent choice.

The final important person to mention is Mamitu. She is, of course best known to us as the former fistula surgeon under the guidance of her great friend and mentor Catherine Hamlin. She is still in the operating theatre, quietly cleaning and fetching and helping wherever she can!

I had many conversations with various staff members, and there is a general atmosphere of hope and positivity about the future.



Mamitu helping in the theatre



Noella, Drs Tigist, Bitou and Binyam with Dr Andrew Browning operating



Mamitu with Andrew Browning



Grass cutting at Desta Mender



Dairy shed at Desta Mender

The College of Midwives is looking impressive especially the lecture theatre. We met Dr Anteneh the new dean who showed Andrew Browning and me around, along with Drs Binyam and Youssef and Noella. It is almost finished and will be a great asset once in use.

There are still a few finishing touches to put in. The external access road to the College and Desta Mender hasn't been sealed yet, but it has been graded.

The library in the College has all IT connected. I don't really understand these things, but it looked impressive! The IT guy from the hospital has set up a camera attached to the theatre light. It has a reasonable view of the operation which can be screened to the lecture theatre in the College, if needed. It was very gratifying to know that all these improvements were only possible because of the generosity of Australian donors.

The Ethiopian government has done outstanding work in dealing with maternal mortality rates. I believe it has been halved in the past 15 years. Of course Hamlin midwives have contributed to that. Even though only 20 to 50 midwives graduate each

year, their training is excellent and is recognised as such by everyone. With the introduction of the Master's degree that benefit will be magnified. The Master's graduates will act as mentors to junior midwives, and some of them will go on to become lecturers at midwives' colleges.

I paid only a brief visit to Desta Mender, but was struck once again by the beauty of the grounds. They are lush and green, with a backdrop of forested mountains. We spent a few minutes watching grounds staff cut the grass with small scythes, and wondering if a lawnmower would be a good gift! We also visited the small dairy herd which is there.

Every time I visit Ethiopia, I am reminded about how lucky we are in Australia. I've seen fistulas in Australia but very rarely. Our health services allow us to prevent the problem from happening, and that is what needs to happen in Ethiopia. If we can continue to give support to the hospital, to the College of Midwives and to Desta Mender, we can play a part in eradicating fistula in Ethiopia, while changing the lives of countless women, and impacting whole communities.

David Knox and Andrew Browning with Dr Browning's Tanzanian nurse Noella, as well as Drs Anteneh, Youseff and Binyam.



The new lecture theatre.

Undergrad midwifery students appreciating the new rooms and equipment.





Legacy

In 1966, Doctors Reg and Catherine Hamlin had been in Ethiopia for seven years. Their interest in fistula surgery

had begun, but they were working as general obstetricians/gynaecologists at the Princess Tsehaye Hospital in Addis Ababa.

In March of 1966, a baby boy was born. This is his story.

When my 17 year-old mother, developed vaginal bleeding at seven months of pregnancy, my father took to her to the Princess Tsehaye Hospital outpatient department, where she was carefully examined and reassured that her pregnancy was normal and that she would give birth to a baby boy.

That boy – that is me, Melaku Abreha – grew up and studied medicine. As part of my degree, I joined Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital for a two-month attachment. During that time, I did 27 simple obstetric fistula surgeries with the help of the entire team. Dr Catherine Hamlin was the leadership angel of the campus. I watched her start every day with prayer at the chapel, make her rounds, attend the outpatient department and operate in the theatre. But the thing that mattered most to me was that at the end of the day, while urging us to go home, she would make a second round to make sure her patients were not in pain. Then she would go home to her muddy house in the hospital grounds. She and her home served me and many others with great affection. She gave us cake and lemon drink. I will never forget that for my whole life.

I often wondered if I could ever be a part of this amazing team.

After finishing my post graduate study, I was assigned as an obstetric and gynaecology specialist and medical director of Adigrat Hospital, where I served for three years. I heard that Mekelle Hamlin Fistula Centre opened in February 2006. It was my dream to join Hamlin Fistula so I returned to Addis Ababa for an interview.

I was interviewed by several people including Dr Catherine Hamlin. Suddenly, in the middle of the interrogation, Dr Catherine said, “He will be the one who runs my centre at Mekelle”. The way she said it was like a blow to my mind, and I made a promise to myself to keep her legacy as long as I live in this world.

I now work as consultant uro-gyneacologist, gynecologist and obstetrician. I have become an expert fistula surgeon and medical director at Mekelle Hamlin Fistula Centre and am also an instructor for local, national and international doctors studying obstetric fistula surgery and uro-gyneacology.

I have now served Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia for 19 years. The only person to have served longer is Dr Catherine Hamlin. All my personal and professional achievements, as well as my life principles, integrity and energy are inspired by her. I am trying to cultivate all my juniors to fulfil her dreams to make Ethiopia free of fistula and to serve humankind irrespective of race, religion or political ideation.

About two years before she died, my mother saw Dr Catherine Hamlin on television. She told me, “That doctor and her husband are the doctors who examined me when I was pregnant with you.”

On the 18th of March this year, the anniversary of Dr Catherine’s passing – and the day before my 60th birthday – I lit a candle and prayed with great thankfulness for her life and legacy.

When prevention is better than cure

As well as treating fistulas, Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is emphasizing work to prevent the injury from happening in the first place. This is the story of one such happy ending.

My name is Mawadi, and I am delighted to share that I delivered my baby late last year! I named her Hafsa.

This pregnancy was particularly difficult for me. I went into labour for several days, struggling through the pain. In my previous pregnancies, I experienced bleeding at home and did not receive adequate help from health workers. This time, however, I knew I needed to seek assistance. I went to

the health centre to get help from the midwife because the labor was intense and overwhelming.

I am grateful to say that this time, I received all the support I needed for a safe delivery. I am currently free from complications, which is a huge relief. I have learned how crucial it is to deliver at a health centre where essential support is available. Knowing that if I had lost too much blood or faced any complications, the staff would be there to help me made a significant difference.

I encourage my neighbours to visit the health centre before and after delivery to experience the same level of comfortable service that I received.

I am happy to have a healthy baby and want to express my heartfelt

gratitude to the midwife, all the staff, and the health centre for their support during my stay. Their care has made all the difference in my journey to motherhood.



Mawadi with her husband and baby Hafsa. Safely delivered and ready to go home.