



HAMLIN
FISTULA
AUSTRALIA

Treatment, prevention and raising awareness of obstetric fistulas

WINTER 2023

Midwives College

"Midwifery I believe is the answer – to put a well-trained midwife in every village would soon eradicate obstetric fistula." – Dr Catherine Hamlin

The existing road at the College. The old dining room is on the left, but it will soon be replaced with a new cafe and shaded terraces where students can relax or study.

There are about 17,000 midwives in Ethiopia. That means there is just one midwife for every 218 births.

The Ethiopian government has an interim target for 25,000 midwives. The demand for midwives in the future is only going to grow, so what is the best way to increase not only the number of midwives, but also their expertise?

Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia (supported by Hamlin Fistula Australia) is the obvious answer. They have the trainers, the technology and most importantly, the space to expand current facilities to provide many, many more highly trained midwives well into the future.



Hamlin Fistula Australia Limited Administering the Hamlin Fistula Relief and Aid Fund
Postal Address PO Box 965 Wahroonga NSW 2076 ■ Email emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au
Website www.hamlinfistula.org.au ■ Phone 02 8007 7435 ■ Fax 02 8007 7470
ABN 58 076 840 250 | CFN 16100 | DGR 900 484 487

Special thanks to everyone who provided photographs for this newsletter.

Hamlin College of Midwives



This was the original accommodation for the students when the College opened in 2010. It will be demolished with the asbestos removed and the new two-storey library built in its place. The existing library will be converted to two classrooms and a teaching laboratory. Between the new library and the old library will be a lecture theatre with tiered seating and the technology to broadcast presentations via internet.

At the International Partners Meeting in Addis Ababa last year, a concept plan to expand the Hamlin College of Midwives was presented to all the Partners and Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia Board and Executive. The proposal was supported by the Partners as it became clear that the current buildings were inadequate to meet the needs of the College. In 2022 HFE enrolled 32 Masters of Science students and accommodated them at Desta Mender, the patient rehabilitation village. Desta Mender provides a program for ex-fistula patients. Usually, about 75 women stay there for four months to get training which allows them to live even more productive lives when they return to their homes. So the introduction of 32 MSc students is a short-term solution at best, as both programs have been significantly disrupted.

Hamlin Fistula Australia has been asked to fund the expansion of the Midwives College, as HFE intends to increase the undergraduate admissions from 20 to 100 a year. As well as new classrooms and library, a new kitchen and dining facilities, and accommodation for the extra undergraduates and MSc students will be needed. As 60% of the MSc students are men, it adds a further complication

to the accommodation needs, as all the undergraduates are women.

Denis Pontin, Deputy Chair of Hamlin Fistula Australia (HFA), worked with Yoseph Bereded from Abba Architects to design accommodation and new classrooms, a new library and expanded kitchen and dining facilities as well as a secure fence to prevent hyenas from entering the compound at night. He has recently returned from a visit to Ethiopia, and he was able to witness the building excitement as the time for breaking ground on the new buildings comes nearer.

"A lot of work was done by Abba Architects under Yoseph's supervision with input from staff at HFE to finalize the design so that it could be tendered," he said. "The Procurement process that HFE has to comply with is quite comprehensive. Abba Architects worked closely with HFE and HFA to select five builders who could do the work and a select tender was agreed. The budget was agreed with the HFA Board as three million dollars and a Bill of Quantities was prepared and adjustments made to the design to meet the budget. In March 2023 the tender was sent out and the builder's prices came back for consideration. Unfortunately they were all significantly higher than the



Dr Catherine with Annette Bennett

budget. Denis was in Ethiopia when the final bids came in and was able to work through the project with the College staff and Yoseph to reduce the scope significantly but without compromising the outcome for the College. Finally, a contract was signed and although the projected cost now stands at four million dollars it will provide the College with modern and expanded facilities for the future."

These are big numbers! But as we contemplate the numbers and the measurements and the plans, we always need to remember the people who are the beneficiaries of these plans. Current research has shown that over half the



The current undergraduate accommodation.

women in Ethiopia do not give birth in a hospital or medical facility. With around five percent of pregnancies resulting in obstructive labour this means that poor women in outlying rural areas must rely on local government health centres for medical assistance. The Hamlin College of Midwives is currently providing midwives to over 80 of these health centres and their work in identifying risk in pregnancy and providing pre- and post-natal support as well as delivering babies has resulted in significantly fewer complications and fistulas.

The incidence of fistulas will further reduce if a woman suffering obstructive labour can have a caesarean section. The MSc midwife graduates are being trained to do emergency C-sections where no doctors or hospitals are available. This will mean the survival of more babies and mothers. There is also a cultural element to be taken into account. Many women do not want to have their babies in hospital and the trust developed with Hamlin midwives is important in prevention of birth injuries and the death of mother or baby.

The funding of this major building program at the Hamlin College of Midwives by Hamlin Fistula Australia is life changing! Not only will the campus be transformed into a modern learning environment, but the facilities can also be used by the fistula surgeons who work for HFE to make presentations and do practical workshops that can be sent via internet to other centres and even other countries where there is a need for training in fistula surgery and patient care.

Hamlin Fistula Australia has always played a significant role in supporting the work of Drs Catherine and Reg Hamlin. But the work goes on, and with every new midwife, we get closer and closer to Dr Catherine Hamlin's goal of complete eradication of fistula in Ethiopia.



Denis Pontin was fond of sharing a joke with Dr Catherine. Though she is longer there, her influence lives on.



"Desta Mender" the city of Joy" was built in 2002 and now awaits a renewal so that the vital work of rehabilitation can carry on.



The old library and computer room has done sterling service. But now we look forward to even better learning facilities.

Borene's joy returns



Fistula affects Ethiopian women of every age, class and background, not just poor or rural women.

Borene (centre photo) is an example of an educated woman who, through circumstances out of her control, had to face the fear and misery of fistula alone – like so many others – until the Hamlin Fistula Hospital came to her rescue.

Borene's family lives in Jarte Jardgen, a village of Shambu Woreda. She is the eldest of seven siblings. Her parents are farmers in the rural area of Western Oromia. She left home to go to university in Wollega, and it was there she met her husband who was on the staff of the university.

The marriage was happy and Borene and her husband were thrilled when she became pregnant.

As the time came for her to give birth, Borene suspended her studies and moved back to her family. She discovered that the nearest health centre had been severely damaged by war, she had no transport available, and even if transport could be found, there was no other health centre near enough to help with the delivery. As with so many women in Ethiopia, her only option was to have the baby at home. But the birth was complicated and prolonged. After a full week at home, her parents were able to get her to Shambu Hospital, where a stillborn baby was delivered. Soon after, Borene woke up to a wet bed. The fear, pain and shame of the fistula she was suffering kept her in the hospital for a month, but eventually she had to go back to her parents' home where she struggled along for months, too ashamed to tell anyone what was happening. She felt completely hopeless and thought that she was the only

person ever to have a fistula. Depression set in as she believed that she would never be healed, but through it all, she remembered to pray. Her prayers were answered when someone told her she could get treatment in Addis Ababa. A tiny glimmer of hope pushed her to get all the way to Addis by herself, to check in to St. Paul's Hospital. Finally, the staff at St Paul's, recognising that she was suffering from a fistula, referred her to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

At last Borene was joyful again! She met many, many fistula patients, just like herself. She watched the clinical team at the hospital restore health, hope and dignity. As well as surgery Borene received counselling from the staff and, as a result, her next pregnancy may end in a much happier way.

And in the wonderful way the Hamlin Fistula Hospital has of inspiring people to pass on the good gifts they have received, Borene plans to finish her degree in management, and then add a degree in health so she can continue to pay it forward in the lives of Ethiopians.