Program: The Fistula Foundation

Website: www.fistulafoundation.org

Mission: The Mission of the Fistula Foundation is to raise awareness of and funding for fistula treatment, prevention, and educational programs worldwide.

History of the Organization: Dr. Catherine Hamlin came to Ethiopia in 1959 with her now late husband Dr. Reginald Hamlin. Together, they founded the Hamlin Fistula Hospitals in 1974 in the nation’s capital city of Addis Ababa. Today, it is the largest facility in the world devoted exclusively to fistula care.

Richard Haas and his daughter, Shaleece, started American Friends Foundation for Childbirth Injuries, later known as The Fistula Foundation, after visiting the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and being moved by the oasis of healing created there. They returned to California and established a US-based non-profit dedicated to supporting the treatment and prevention activities of the Fistula Hospital. In 2003, a highly praised New York Times Op-Ed by Pulitzer Prize winning author, Nicholas Kristof, lauded the work of Dr. Hamlin and raised awareness of and funding for the hospital.

In January 2004, the Oprah Winfrey Show invited Dr. Hamlin to speak about the plight of fistula patients in Ethiopia. In the first six weeks after her appearance on the show, over 6,000 donors contributed $1.3 million through the Fistula Foundation to Dr. Hamlin’s cause.


- Ethiopia is one of the world’s poorest countries. It is a vast country — twice the size of Texas — with only 3,000 miles of paved roads and a population of 88 million.

- Despite the diversity of the peoples, the dynamic culture and history, and the dramatic landscape, the vast majority of the Ethiopian population is impoverished. Most eke out a subsistence living and have virtually no access to healthcare.1

- Ethiopia is in the Horn of Africa, where refugees fleeing drought and famine are pouring in from neighboring Somalia.

- Located in East Africa, Ethiopia is divided into 13 self-governing regions, each with their own languages, cultures and traditions.
• Amharic is Ethiopia's official language, but there are nearly 80 local languages spoken.
• Almost two-thirds of Ethiopian people are illiterate. The economy revolves around agriculture, which in turn relies on rainfall.  
• Ethiopia’s main exports include coffee, hides, oilseeds, beeswax, sugarcane. Coffee is critical to the Ethiopian economy with exports of some $350 million in 2006, but historically low prices have seen many farmers switching to qaat – a flowering plant used as an amphetamine-like stimulant and an illegal substance in many countries -- to supplement income.  
• Today, Muslims account for 45% of the population, Ethiopian Christian Orthodox for 35%, and other religions including animism account for the remaining 20% of the population.

Ethiopia: The Need for Fistula Surgery
- Fistula is a serious problem in Ethiopia.
- The maternal death rate is among the highest in the world.
- Having many children is extolled. And an Ethiopian woman is likely to marry as a teenager and give birth to six children, not counting those she will lose during pregnancy or within the first five years of life.
- Pregnant women customarily deliver their babies at home with only a female elder in attendance.
- The closest skilled doctor may be hundreds of miles away.
- The number of obstetricians and gynecologists is abysmally low – just one for roughly every 530,000 people.

--The Fistula Foundation

Young patients at the Hamlin Fistula Hospital.

History of the Region:
• Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa and one of the oldest in the world – at least 2,000 years (may be traced to the Aksumite Kingdom, which coalesced in the first century B.C.)
• Unlike many African countries, the ancient Ethiopian monarchy was never colonized “with the exception of a short-lived Italian occupation by Mussolini from 1936-41.”
• Ethiopia’s Rift Valley is known as the cradle of humanity – fossils of the oldest known upright hominin, the 3.5-million-year-old ‘Lucy’, were found there in 1974.
• Records of Ethiopian rulers date back 5000 years, and the Queen of Sheba’s son, Menelik I, is regarded as the first emperor. Menelik’s dynasty continued into the early twentieth century when Haile Selassie took over rule.
• According to local tradition, ancient Ethiopians were Jewish. Ethiopian Orthodoxy arrived as early as 330 A.D. and until the Marxist revolution, there were Orthodox clergy in almost every town in the country.
The Project: DFW’s donations will be used to transform the lives of 66 Ethiopian women from ones of devastating isolation and incontinence to ones of health and dignity; these women will be treated for the childbirth injury, obstetric fistula, at the Hamlin Fistula Hospitals in Ethiopia.

The Hamlin Fistula Hospital, also known as the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, was founded in response to the hidden epidemic of fistula.

Since its inception, surgeons at the Hamlin Fistula Hospital have operated on 35,000 girls and women, at no cost to the patients.

The Hospital is known globally as a center of excellence in fistula treatment and an oasis of healing for the women treated there. The women who find their way to the Fistula Hospital have suffered both physical and psychological traumas. The Hospital is dedicated to their holistic treatment, from repairing their injuries to restoring their dignity.

To help women in the provinces who need fistula care and to prevent fistulas, the Fistula Hospital has built five new regional hospitals.

Dining for Women’s donations will provide 66 needy women with free, safe surgery to repair their devastating injuries and also provide post-operative care. This care will give these women a second chance at life, returning their health and dignity and enabling them to contribute to their families and community.

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What is Fistula?

Obstetric fistula is the most devastating and serious of all childbirth injuries. It happens because most mothers in poor countries give birth without any medical help. So many are young girls.

Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are among the leading causes of death and disability for women of reproductive age in Ethiopia.

Obstetric fistula was eradicated in the United States more than 100 years ago thanks to emergency cesarean section surgery.

After enduring days of agonizing, obstructed labor a woman’s body is literally broken by childbirth. During labor contractions, the baby’s head is constantly pushing against the mother’s pelvic bone — causing tissue to die due to lack of blood flow to this area. All of that pushing creates a hole, or in medical terms a “fistula", between the birth passage and an internal organ such as the bladder or rectum. A woman cannot hold her urine, and sometimes bowel content as well.

Her baby is unlikely to survive. If she survives, a woman with fistula is likely to be rejected by her husband because of her inability to bear more children and her foul smell. She will be shunned by her community and forced to live an isolated existence. These women suffer profound psychological trauma resulting from their utter loss of status and dignity, in addition to suffering constantly from their physical internal injury.

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The Fistula Foundation
Project Budget: $31,404.39

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Surgery for 66 Women*</td>
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<tr>
<td>[$450 per patient]</td>
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$450 is an approximate cost per patient. This includes:
- Surgery
- Post-operative care
- Rehabilitation
- Transportation costs (for example, bus fare home)
- New dress

$450 is an average figure; more complicated surgeries, eg. treating both vaginal and rectal fistulas, extensive scarring and nerve damage, can be more costly.

How They Measure Success:
Surgeons and hospitals that receive grant funding from the Fistula Foundation are required to provide regular and detailed reports to the Foundation. These reports include detailed budgets describing their spending, and narrative describing their activities and services provided as well as any challenges encountered.

In addition, the Fistula Foundation asks doctors to share their perspectives as care providers and to send one patient story each year and a photograph.

Success means repairing patients’ fistulas, putting an end to the suffering caused by their physical internal injury, and helping them overcome profound psychological trauma resulting from their loss of status and dignity.

The Fistula Foundation works to empower dedicated local doctors in developing countries by providing grants to cover the costs of patients’ fistula surgery.

Each patient receives surgery, post-operative care, rehabilitation, transportation costs, and a new dress.
The Fistula Foundation Financial Profile

Program Expenses . . . 80.6%
Administrative Expenses . . . 9.7%
Fundraising Expenses . . . 9.6%

The Fistula Foundation consistently directs more than 75% of expenses to program and has achieved a four star Charity Navigator rating for four consecutive years, ranking the Fistula Foundation as one of the top 5% of all U.S. charities.

Sources:

1The Fistula Foundation http://www.fistulafoundation.org/wherewehelp/ethiopia/about.html
4Ibid
5Ibid
6Ibid
7The Fistula Foundation http://www.fistulafoundation.org/wherewehelp/ethiopia/about.html
8Ibid
9Ibid

Changing the world one dinner at a time