One woman at a time.
That is how we fight fistula.
By restoring health and dignity to one.
One woman with the will to survive.
She is still waiting.

Take time to learn
one woman’s story.

DEDICATED TO RAISING AWARENESS OF AND FUNDING FOR FISTULA PREVENTION,
TREATMENT AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS WORLDWIDE.

www.fistulafoundation.org

PHOTO CREDITS:
Many thanks to Paula Allen / V-Day, Fistula Foundation Board member Larry William, MD, French photographer Livia Saavedra, our dedicated partner Women and Health Alliance International and our esteemed colleague Ruth C. Kennedy of Abraham’s Oasis and our grantees for so kindly providing photos featured in this document.
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“Just about the worst thing that can happen to a teenage girl in this world is to develop an obstetric fistula that leaves her trickling bodily wastes and shunned by everyone around her.”

Nicholas D. Kristof

Pulitzer Prize Winner, New York Times Columnist
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Our staff met Bayesh during a visit in
August 2011 to celebrate the opening of
the new fistula center at Gondar University
Hospital.

17 year-old Bayesh is receiving care at the new
international research, training and treatment center
devoted to fistula funded by the Fistula Foundation in
partnership with Women and Health Alliance International
located in the north of Ethiopia.

Bayesh is the wife of Cafaly, who is a farmer. They grew
up together in the same village, and fell in love — like
many teenagers do all over the world. At age 14, Bayesh
married Cafaly. Bayesh’s first childbirth delivery failed
recently. She endured prolonged, painful obstructed
labor at home, with no medical help. Her father, a priest,
brought his daughter here to the Gondar University
Hospital. Bayesh had been in labor for four days. Her
uterus had ruptured. Bayesh survived, but developed
the childbirth injury obstetric fistula for two possible
reasons — her pelvis was too small or a malposition of her baby inside her birth canal. Cafaly is waiting
for his wife to return home, hopefully soon. Contributions to the Fistula Foundation are helping restore
lives for many women and adolescent girls — and their families — in developing countries throughout
Africa and South Asia.

 For more about this project and others, visit: http://www.fistulafoundation.org

In August 2011, Fistula Foundation Executive Director Kate Grant visited Ethiopia to celebrate the
opening of this Center. To read the story and see photos from this visit, check out our fall 2011
newsletter, Transformations, which is also available on our website.

 Visit: http://www.fistulafoundation.org/pressroom/newsletters.html
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Kalia is so frustrated.  She won’t look at the passengers boarding the bus.  And they will not look at her.  Kalia isn’t thinking about the tear that escaped and is now rolling down her cheek.  She’s thinking about something more important.  How is she going to reach Gondar?

This is a glimpse of one moment in Kalia’s struggle to regain her dignity.  Kalia is from a remote and isolated village in Ethiopia.  Like so many women in the world’s poorest countries, when the time came for her to deliver her baby, she was at home – without any medical help.  In Ethiopia, only 6% of births are assisted by a skilled birth attendant.  When she developed a fistula and lost her baby, Kalia’s life was shattered.  Everyone shunned her, including her husband.

The people who visited her village talked with her about the childbirth injury obstetric fistula, and arranged for her transportation on this bus.  The driver had insisted they pay him a higher price.  Because of her offensive smell, the bus driver asked Kalia and some other fistula patients to get off.  Thankfully, they were allowed back on this bus and taken to Gondar located in the north of Ethiopia.

Kalia was treated in January 2011 at the gynecological ward of Gondar University’s College of Medicine and Health Sciences, a busy hospital serving a catchment area of 5 million Ethiopian citizens.  At the time, the capacity of this ward was limited to 15 patient beds.  Thanks to donations to the Fistula Foundation, in the summer of 2011 this teaching hospital opened a new international research, training and treatment center dedicated to fistula treatment.  This project is overseen by our capable partners at WAHA International in close partnership with Gondar University’s College of Medicine and Health Sciences.  The Fistula Foundation provided the majority of funding for the Center’s construction.  One floor of the new teaching hospital building is dedicated for use as a new fistula treatment and training center.  The center has two operating theaters and 70 beds allocated to fistula patients.  Thankfully, more fistula patients are receiving high quality treatment here, every day.

 Emblem: For more about this project and others, visit: http://www.fistulafoundation.org
Wubete is featured in the award-winning documentary *A Walk to Beautiful* a powerful story of healing and hope. Special thanks to our friends at Abraham’s Oasis for these latest updates about this strong young woman who has inspired so many.

At the age of 15, suffering from an obstetric fistula, having been rejected by her husband and community, Wubete took a journey across her country on a quest to reclaim her life. She walked to the Hamlin Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa, where she received free, safe fistula surgery and care. Unfortunately, her injuries were so severe, even after multiple surgeries, she remains incontinent.

Today, Wubete and ten other long-term fistula patients work for Abraham’s Oasis, an orphanage located in the northern Tigray region. Ruth C. Kennedy of Abraham’s Oasis confides to us, “Wubete started life with so much to lose.” She quickly adds, “But it is because of that very heartbreak that we have gained a jewel. Wubete now prepares tasty meals for the children here, she hugs the babies, attends evening school, and buys pretty dresses in the market. She is part of our vibrant community.”
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Wubalem lives in Ethiopia. She is 16 years old. Wubalem was ten years old when her parents decided that it was time for her to get married. At 16 she became pregnant with her first child. Wubalem was scared of childbirth and when labor started it was even more painful than she expected.

Women in her village gathered in her house to help Wubalem, but with no success. After waiting for three days her uncle suggested they take her to a hospital.

They started the journey hoping that she would be able to deliver a healthy baby. After they had walked for an hour they arrived at the health center, but after trying for a day to help Wubalem deliver her baby they told her to go to a bigger hospital where they could find a doctor. When they finally got to the hospital that was a four hour drive away Wubalem delivered a still born baby. She was told that she had a fistula which could be treated in Addis Ababa.

Wubalem traveled to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital where she stayed for three months going through two operations to be completely cured. After that she was sent home to her village but was told that she would have to go to a hospital the next time she gets pregnant. Wubalem is now back at the hospital for a different reason: to deliver her baby.
Take time to learn one woman’s story.

The Fistula Foundation is supporting the work of the highly respected CURE International Hospital in Kabul Afghanistan that is building fistula treatment capacity and training in this conflict-ridden country.

CURE’s Medical Director Dr. Richard Manning shared this story about Fauzia, a recent fistula patient.

Fauzia's story is one which tragically highlights so well the suffering which a young woman can be made to endure in Afghanistan. When she arrived at CURE International Hospital in June 2010 from a small village near Kabul City, she was 35 years old, but her problem with obstetric fistula (OF) had started 25 years earlier at the age of 10 after she gave birth to a stillborn child. Twice before coming to CURE, other surgeons at different hospitals in Kabul had tried unsuccessfully to repair her fistula.

As bad as all of the fistula symptoms were, it is hard to grasp the enormity of suffering which she was made to endure. Pregnant at age 10 -- by whom? Losing a child. This tragedy is all too common in Afghanistan. School? Out of the question. Making friends? With whom? How about feeling hopeful regarding a chance to have the problem fixed not once, but twice before, only to wake up disappointed? How many of us would have been willing to undergo yet a third procedure? How many of us would have been willing to go on living? Her courage and determination staggers the imagination.

It is a good thing that she didn't know that the more failed attempts a patient has at OF repair, the less chance she has of ever having the problem surgically corrected. Dr. Sofia Hail, a graduate of Dr. Sofia Hail, Director, Obstetric Fistula Program, CURE International Hospital (Kabul, Afghanistan)
CURE International's OB/GYN fellowship and director of its obstetric fistula program in Kabul Afghanistan, understood well the complexities which a third OF repair would present. Because of this she waited until a visiting expert surgeon, Dr. Tom Raassen, was in Kabul to help with the repair. It was a wise decision reflecting professionalism and humility and above all her compassion for this woman. Together, at CURE International Hospital, on June 21 2010, Dr. Raassen as trainer and Dr. Hail as trainee, repaired Fauzia's fistula in an operation that took 4 hours. Exactly two weeks later, Fauzia left the hospital without wearing a diaper for the first time in 25 years.

There are parts to this story that many of us would like to change, but are not within our power to do so. However, the one that stands out that we can change has to do with the delay in Fauzia seeking care at CURE International. She remained in Kabul without coming to our hospital to be evaluated for three years even though our obstetric fistula program had been running since mid 2007. Whether from fear of another procedure, lack of hope in any care offered in Afghanistan, financial concerns, or simply being unaware of CURE's program, she suffered for three years longer than she had to. What a shame. We can and must get the word out to the many women in Afghanistan suffering with obstetric fistula so we change this tragic scenario one life at a time. We have undertaken a concerted outreach program including advertising, a dedicated community outreach coordinator to get the word out that treatment is available, so fewer women suffer for years the way Fauzia did. We appreciate the Fistula Foundation's support of this work.

-- Richard Manning MD, Medical Director, CURE International Hospital (Kabul, Afghanistan)
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Board Member, Dr. Larry William visited the Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The following is Dr. William's account of his trip in the spring of 2010.

I visited the Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo (known as the DRC) early this June. This part of DRC has suffered greatly from its closeness to Rwanda. When the genocide in Rwanda concluded about 16 years ago, many of the perpetrators of that enormous human tragedy fled to neighboring countries. Now, the Interahamwe, the murderers from Rwanda, live in the forests of the DRC where they terrorize the local population. However, these are not the only thugs who prey on the local population. Eastern Congo has had other major conflicts with ever-changing militias who have raped, bludgeoned and pillaged the local population with abandon. A recent study of Eastern DRC published in the Journal of the American Medical Association stated that 67% of households have experienced conflict-related human rights abuses against family members, including physical and sexual violations.

Panzi Hospital is a veritable island of healing in one of the worst neighborhoods on earth. The hospital treats a general medical population as well as women with fistula, treated in a special ward. While the vast majority of these patients developed their fistulas from the absence of emergency obstetrics, the local conflicts also play a major role in this problem. Often women are afraid to seek help for troubled deliveries because they fear attacks en route to hospitals. These women suffer the horrors of unsuccessful obstructed labor at home and, usually after days of fruitless labor, have both a stillborn child and an obstetric fistula.

Wabiwa is 21. She lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
It was at Panzi Hospital that I met and talked with several patients, among them Wabiwa, a 21-year-old woman. She was pregnant and close to her delivery date when she went to collect mushrooms in the forest along with a lady friend. There they were surprised by five soldiers of the Interwehame. Both women were serially raped by all 5 men, then raped again with foreign objects, and then abandoned. Wabiwa says that after this her neighbors brought her to a local hospital where she shortly after delivered a stillborn baby. Then she bled for a week and found that she continuously leaked urine—the sign of a fistula resulting from her trauma.

The local hospital could not treat this problem, so she was transferred by ambulance to a regional hospital. Again they found her fistula problem too complex for their facility and so in April she was transferred to the Panzi Hospital. She has had a successful surgery and will eventually return home to her husband and 6-year-old child. Currently, she is no longer in the fistula surgery section of the hospital but is getting psychological care from the victims of sexual violence portion of Panzi. In addition to the large ward for fistula care, this hospital has another specialized ward for treatment of women who have suffered sexual violence, a ward for care of orphaned and abused children under the age of 12, and a ward for patients with HIV disease, often a consequence of sexual attacks. It is the only facility that can manage complex fistula care in a region with a population greater than 2 million people.

I left the DRC in awe of the great work being done at the Panzi Hospital, but aghast at the enormous human tragedies I witnessed.
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ASOSA, AGE 18 (ETHIOPIA)

I studied in school until 7th grade. I helped my mother at home with housework, but I didn't have to
carry too many heavy things. I got married when I was 15. I met my husband for the first time on
my wedding day. My parents chose him for me. I felt sad that I had to quit my education, but
otherwise I liked my husband. He was a good man.

I got pregnant one year later. My pregnancy was fine. My labor started at three in the afternoon and
my husband and my mother were with me. A traditional doctor told me to go to the hospital. I got a
free letter from my kebele. I went to Asosa Hospital and they operated to take out the baby, but it
was dead.

After the baby died, I went back to my village and two months later my husband married another
woman. My friends were there to help me in the village. I lived with my mother. When I came to
Fistula Hospital, I was very happy. I knew this was the place where I would get cured. It has been 15
days since my operation and now I am dry.

I have made friends here. We have fun together and we talk about our health and our operations. We
ask each other, what will you do when you are cured?

When I am cured, I want to go back home and continue my education. I want to study and I want to
become a doctor like the doctors here and help girls like me who have this problem.

When I go back to my village, I will tell other women to go immediately to a hospital so that they
won't have a problem with their labor. Most people don't know that a hospital can help them, but if
they knew, they'd go.
Take time to learn one woman’s story.

SIMENYE NIGUSE, AGE 19 (ETHIOPIA)

I came to live with my cousin in Oromia when my parents died a long time ago. I was living with my cousin in a refugee camp when he chose a husband for me. I was married one year ago and I got pregnant right away.

During the labor, my cousin and my husband and some neighbor women were with me. I was in labor for four days and on the fourth day, the baby came, but it was dead. When the baby died, my husband left me. I think the baby died because I had a sickness when I was pregnant. I caught this sickness from the wind.

People said that my body was wounded. My cousin heard that there was a place in Addis Ababa that could help me and so he brought me here. I came here on Monday and the people he told me I will be cured.

I haven't had my operation yet. I don't know what I will feel. They say I will have the operation next week and that my operation will be a simple one.

When I am cured, if my cousin will let me, I want to stay here in Addis Ababa and work in someone’s house. Otherwise, if I go back home to Oromia to my cousin, I’ll go to school. I'd like to go to school.
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SUNDAY (SUDAN)

In the spring of 2010, the Foundation received an email from a dedicated missionary in Sudan seeking help for a young woman disabled with a fistula. In this day and age the Internet is connecting us to people in distant corners of the globe in need of help. The missionary had found out about the Foundation’s work through the Internet. She asked if we could send the young woman named Sunday to either the Panzi Hospital in Congo or the Hamlin Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia for treatment. Because the Panzi Hospital is in a war zone we suggested the Hamlin Hospital and contacted their CEO and Medical Director. The Foundation purchased plane tickets to transport Sunday to Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa for life changing surgery there.

Sunday's story is unfortunately far too common. She married early and lived in a remote Sudanese village. She became pregnant and was looking forward to motherhood. Tragically, this was not to be. Sunday stayed in agonizing labor for days, delivered a still born baby and awakened from this nightmare to discover that she was incontinent.

There was no hospital that could treat her in the Sudan and Sunday, having no passport or money, hardly ever having left her village, had no place to turn to for help.
Thanks to a resourceful and dedicated missionary, the skilled doctors at the Hamlin Hospital and the support of generous donors like you Sunday was able to get the treatment she desperately needed. Her surgery was a success!

In her convalescence, Sunday was taught to embroider, and is now doing amazing work with the skills she learnt at the Hospital. She flew home to the Sudan and traveled back to her village where her family, who had been supportive of her during her ordeal, awaited her.

Heartfelt thanks once again to our faithful supporters whose generosity allows us to help women such as this.
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NANEYE AFTAMU, AGE 16  
(DARA VILLAGE, SHOA, ETHIOPIA)

I got married four years ago and then I got pregnant two years later.

My pregnancy was fine. I was not sick until the labor. My family was with me during the labor and also my husband. I was in labor for a long time. On the 4th day, they took me to a health center. At the health center, I delivered a dead baby and they told me that I needed to come here to Addis Ababa to Fistula Hospital. My husband brought me here and he is waiting for me to get cured.

The people here [at Fistula Hospital] are very kind. They gave me an operation so that I would not leak anymore. I was not scared of the operation. I am happy to be cured and to be going home again. I don’t know what I will do when I go home. I will get my health back first and then I will think about it.
I got married three years ago. I got pregnant one year ago. When I was six months pregnant, I left my husband’s house and went to my mother’s house so that I could have my baby at home with my mother. When I started my labor, my mother and my sisters were there with me.

I was in labor for three days and it was very difficult.

My stomach was hurting me so much. After the third day, my mother took me to Arba Minch Hospital where the doctor took out the dead baby. They took me back to my mother’s house and I was very sick. I didn't walk for 10 days. My husband was not there with me during my sickness so three months after the baby died, I left him.

The doctor at Arba Minch gave me a referral paper and told me to go to Addis Ababa. I took a bus all day to come here. I was very sick and so they gave me medicine for three months before I could have my operation. I was scared of the operation at the beginning, but when I knew that there was no pain, it was okay. After the operation, I stayed in bed for a long time to recover.

If it is possible, I want to get married again and have a baby. I will go back to my mother’s house and I will work in my village. I look forward to going home and seeing my friends again without this sickness.
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Help Give a Young Woman a New Life

Photo credit: WAHA International

LOVE-A-SISTER

Change one woman's life forever. Join the Love-A-Sister program and cover the cost for one woman's free, safe fistula surgery – either as a one-time donation of $450 or a monthly donation of $37.50. While $450 isn't enough for one night's stay in most hospitals in the United States, it is enough to provide one woman with restorative surgery and postoperative care.

☞ For more information or to donate online, visit www.fistulafoundation.org