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HELENA PTOCHIA

Preserving dignity, one woman at a time



Mankessim Revisited -Dr. Catherine Husa

In May of this year I returned to West Africa to visit the fistula hospital in Mankessim, Ghana. The project to build this charity hospital was undertaken about 10 years ago by Sister Elizabeth Burns of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Louis and is supported by a number of organizations including the government of Ghana, the Archdiocese of Cape Coast, and the Helena Ptochia Foundation. With the completion of a paved, 3 km road to the center, the hospital will be ready for opening and dedication next month.

The hospital and the adjacent Maternal /Child facilities are to address a devastating complication of childbirth in developing countries resulting from inadequate medical care, rampant poverty and malnutrition, lack of education and unavailable transportation. These conditions set the stage for a most debilitating complication of labor called fistula formation and the frequently associated death of the fetus. The actual occurrence of obstetrical fistulas is unknown, but estimated at some 500,000 worldwide, with most in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and South America. Fistulae are uncommon in developed countries because of ready access to good medical care.

A fistula in the context of childbirth refers to an abnormal connection, or tunneling, between two organs such as the bladder and vagina, a vesicovaginal fistula, the rectum and vagina, a rectovaginal fistula or the ureters and vagina, a ureterovaginal fistula. These result in uncontrollable passage of material or fluid such as urine through the vagina or stool through the rectum. Fistulae occur when the blood supply to tissues is interrupted by the prolonged crushing of vaginal tissues by an excessively large or abnormally positioned fetus. The mother is unable to deliver and may not get appropriate care for days.



Frequently the infant is stillborn and, if the mother survives, she is left with incontinence of urine and/or stool. Over 75% of these victims are under the age of 25 and have no other children. They are rejected by family and village and lead a marginal existence. These are, indeed, the poorest of the poor.



Dr. Catherine Husa (r) of Ithaca, NY shown here on her visit to the hospital in Ghana.

The Mankessim project has been built to provide an alternative to the dreadful life these women may be forced to live. Many fistulae can be repaired surgically, giving the patient a second chance in life. The center has been conceived to provide for pre-operative care, estimated at some 2-3 months for severely malnourished women, for surgery and post-op recovery, for physical therapy and even for social rehabilitation. The estimated cost per patient of the care is \$400, for which the patient is not charged. This is on the model of the Addis Abba Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia which has successfully treated thousands of women. The most important "treatment" for the problem of obstetrical fistulae, however, is prevention and a Maternity Hospital will be opening adjacent to the Fistula Hospital. One outreach program has already been established for health education and prenatal care and should help in identifying patients in need.

In May 2008 the hospital construction was completed, with a generator in place and much equipment ready. Since then, a reliable water supply, a new anesthesia machine, staff and, now, a paved road have all been added. I am planning another trip in January 2009 to follow up on these exciting developments and, perhaps, provide some service.

Thank you all for your support and my very best wishes for the Holidays,

Catherine Husa

**"When indeed shall we learn
that we are all related one to the other,
that we are all members of one body?"
~ Helen Keller**

Adirondacks to Africa ... With Love



The Tupper Lake American Legion made lunch for people attending the annual Tin-Man competition in July, donating the proceeds to the Helena Ptochia Foundation. Shown here is Chandler Ralph accepting a check in the amount of \$500 from Ben Peets (c) and Mark Moeller (r).

YES, We Can!

Yes, we can became a well known slogan during the recent national election. It surely applies to those who support the Helena Ptochia Foundation.

In 2003, Chandler Ralph, President of Adirondack Medical Center, read about the plight of young African women in Ghana who suffer physically and are shunned by their family and villages due to fistulas - the result of giving birth way before their bodies are ready. Chandler stood up and said, *yes we can* do something to help these young women, and through a network of women helping women, the Helena Ptochia Foundation was founded. The foundation's mission is to raise and provide funds to assist Sr. Elizabeth Burns in building and maintaining a fistula hospital in Ghana to mend these girls and to provide training to lead a productive life.

Yes, we did! Since that time a network of women across NYS and the country has raised more than \$100,000 for this cause; \$95,000 has been sent to the hospital with the most recent funds going towards the purchase of a new anesthesia machine. An additional \$30,000 has been raised towards a \$35,000 goal to build a staff building for the medical staff to service the hospital.

Yes, we will! To consistently and fully meet the fistula hospital's mission, the Helena Ptochia Foundation continues its commitment to help with much needed funds to provide ongoing services to these voiceless and disenfranchised young women.

Ellen Maroun organized a group of volunteers and held a garage sale in June to benefit the Helena Ptochia Foundation. Standing (l-r) are David Aldrich, Ellen Maroun, Jim & Judy McCartney and JJ Maroun. Seated (l-r) are Chandler Ralph, Jayda and Kristin Meadows.



Sr. Elizabeth Burns proudly displays the new anesthesia machine recently delivered to the fistula hospital. Purchase of this needed equipment was done with funds provided by the Helena Ptochia Foundation.



The hospital will be ready for opening and dedication in December 2008.



During this holiday season, please consider a gift to the **Helena Ptochia Foundation** to help our forgotten African sisters. Be a part of saving over 1,100 lives a year!

Please mail your gift to
HELENA PTOCHIA FOUNDATION
P.O. Box 182, Ray Brook, NY 12977
www.helenaptochiafoundation.org
All gifts are tax exempt.