

Obstetric Fistula

Mercy Ships Programme Fact Sheet

Updated January 2012

About Obstetric Fistula



Jatu, Sierra Leone



Kumba, Sierra Leone



Yamah, Liberia

*Lives transformed
through hope
and healing...*

What is Obstetric Fistula?

Obstetric fistula is a preventable and mostly treatable condition that primarily affects young women from poor backgrounds. Fistula is one of the most devastating of all pregnancy-related disabilities. Usually the result of obstructed labour coupled with a lack of skilled medical care, obstetric fistula most often leads to permanent incontinence – a continuous leakage of urine and loss of control over bowel movements.

How does it happen?

A vaginal fistula, which usually affects pregnant women, results from prolonged labour, usually lasting two to five days, with delivery occurring only after the baby dies. During labour, the baby's head and the woman's pubic bone form a vice, cutting off blood flow to the tissue trapped in this area. Following delivery, the dead tissue sloughs away, leaving an abnormal opening between the birth canal and the bladder (less frequently the rectum). Unable to control the flow of urine (and/or faeces), the woman is perpetually wet and soiled. Affected women are often abandoned by their husbands and ostracized by their families and communities.

Fistula Statistics

- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that every year between 50,000 and 100,000 women sustain an obstetric fistula during childbirth.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that more than two million women are currently living with obstetric fistulas, a large proportion of which are in Africa.
- Women with fistula tend to be young, illiterate and poor, and live in remote areas. (womenone.org)

Transformational health care through Fistula Programmes

Bringing Hope and Healing

Mercy Ships aims to reduce the effects of fistula in women in West Africa by providing specialized medical treatment and training. Mercy Ships uses its hospital ship and also partners with land-based programmes to deliver transformational health care to the forgotten poor.



Patient Screening



Onboard Operations



Fistula Operation



Dress Celebration

Fistula Repair Operations

Onboard our ship, the *Africa Mercy*, Mercy Ships performs free fistula repair operations for affected women. The healed patients are given new dresses and headaddresses as symbols of their restored life.

Training & Prevention

To help build the capacity of health care systems in developing nations to address the condition of fistula, Mercy Ships networks with and provides training for local & international health care professionals including surgeons, nurses and traditional birth attendants.

Accomplishment

Since 1978, Mercy Ships performed more than 61,000 life-changing operations such as cleft lip and palate repair, cataract removal, orthopaedic procedures, facial reconstruction and obstetric fistula repair.