

AREA 25 HEALTH CENTER FISTULA CARE CENTER



**Texas Children's
Hospital®**

Area 25 Health Center offers high-quality obstetric services to women living within the surrounding rural areas as an alternative to delivery at the Central or District Hospitals. This role in obstetric care is an important one as a primary cause of complications resulting from pregnancy and childbirth is delay in access to care. The Area 25 Health Center offers services to women during any stage of their pregnancy and after their baby's birth, including labor and delivery services, a maternity waiting home for prenatal housing and care, pharmacy, and family planning and nutrition counseling. With the ability to provide care for low-risk deliveries here, more space is available for high-risk patients at Kamuzu Central Hospital, and the wait time for these patients is dramatically reduced. Currently, the missing piece at the center is a surgical theater to perform caesarean deliveries. About 15-20% of women will require cesarean delivery for obstructed labor or for concerns about the well-being of the unborn child. Health care providers in Area 25 are forced to send these women by ambulance to KCH, and if an ambulance is not available or traffic is heavy, it can take many hours to reach KCH with potentially devastating consequences for both mother and the baby, including development of obstetric fistula or even death.

Fistula Care Center

Today, an estimated 2 million women and girls in Africa are suffering from obstetric fistula caused by prolonged, obstructed childbirth and lack of access to timely maternity care, primarily cesarean delivery. Not only are these women ostracized from their communities due to the constant odor from leakage of urine, but most often, their babies also die in the process of childbirth leaving these women without a family, community, or any means of emotional or financial support.

In 2010, the Freedom from Fistula Foundation, founded by Ann Gloag, began working to provide Malawian women with fistula the opportunity to change their lives for the better. In 2012, the Fistula Care Centre (FCC) was opened on the grounds of Bwaila Hospital, a district hospital located in Lilongwe. This 35-bed unit has its own dedicated operating room and has the capacity to repair more than 400 women with fistula each year. In addition, it provides patient rehabilitation services and reintegration programs for recovering women. These programs include lessons in arts and crafts, literacy, numeracy, and micro-finance, all of which help to empower women and re-integrate them into society.

The FCC has an Ambassadors program through which recovered fistula patients return to their villages to tell other women about the services offered at the FCC; they are encouraged to bring women back to Lilongwe for free surgeries. In 2013, the FCC established a training program for the next generation of Malawian fistula surgeons to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program.

Fistula surgeries cost approximately \$750 per woman, and on average take one hour to complete, with a few weeks of recovery for the patient. With this small investment and short amount of time, the FCC is restoring dignity to women across Malawi and giving them two things they did not have before: hope and a future. Through the work of dedicated physicians, these women have the opportunity to feel whole again and to reclaim their rightful place in society.