

### **Expert Fistula Surgeons**

Thirteen Nigerian experts in fistula surgery have volunteered their time to the “Fistula Fortnight.” For two weeks, these experts will come together to surgically treat hundreds of women with obstetric fistula and supervise recently trained doctors and nurses.

#### **Dr. Idris Suleiman Abubakar, MBBS**

*Specialist Fistula Surgeon/Obstetric and Gynaecologic Registrar, Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Kano*

Dr. Abubakar met his first fistula patient during his final obstetrics and gynaecology exam at the University of Nigeria in 1992. Later as a house officer, he was recruited to train in fistula surgery with Dr. Kees Waaldijk. Dr. Abubakar was drawn to fistula surgery despite the lack of monetary reward. “There is this joy that you see in the eyes of the patient on the day of discharge after successful surgery,” he says. “Being part of creating that joy is something I cannot substitute.” This dedication has led him to perform some 1,500 fistula surgeries. Dr. Abubakar will be based in Sokoto for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

#### **Dr. Ileogbem Sunday Adeoye, MBBS, FWACS**

*Consultant Obstetrician/Gynaecologist, Ebonyi State University Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki*

Dr. Adeoye studied at the University of Benin’s School of Medicine where he completed a Bachelors of Medicine, a Bachelors of Surgery and post-graduate studies in obstetrics and gynaecology. It was during his residency that he saw his first fistula patient. Adeoye’s experience led him to seek more training in fistula surgery with Drs. Ann Ward and Kees Waaldijk. He went on to establish a fistula treatment centre in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, where an average of five fistula surgeries were performed each week when funding was available. He emphasizes prevention as the key to eliminating fistula: “To prevent fistula, a lot more needs to be done to educate not just the women, but the men, because they control the resources needed to access the services that would prevent fistula.” Dr. Adeoye will be based in Katsina for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

#### **Dr. Idriss Halliru, MBBS, MPH**

*Principal Medical Officer and Specialist Fistula Surgeon, Katsina Specialist Hospital*

Dr. Halliru first heard about fistula as an undergraduate. The stigma associated with the condition made him hesitant to become a fistula surgeon. Nevertheless, when Halliru was approached in 1995 to train with Dr. Kees Waaldijk, he readily took up the challenge. Halliru remained at the Babbar Ruga Fistula Centre for five years and acquired all of the necessary skills to be an expert fistula surgeon. He also spent six weeks at the fistula hospital in Addis Ababa to compare techniques. Halliru is concerned with how the fistula treatment programme will be sustained. “You cannot do fistula work in a normal hospital because you have to do everything for the fistula patient free of charge,” he says, “and there are no funds available to cover these costs.” Dr. Halliru will be based in Katsina for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

**Dr. Zubairu Iiyasu**, MBBS, MPH, FWACP

*Specialist Fistula Surgeon/Consultant Community Physician, Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Kano*

Dr. Iiyasu is not only a volunteer surgeon for the “Fistula Fortnight” – he is also the coordinator, responsible for overseeing arrangements such as trainings and site preparations. Iiyasu trained to become a fistula surgeon with Dr. Kees Waaldijk. From 1991 to 1995, he worked as an Assistant Fistula Surgeon at the Laure Fistula Centre in Kano. An early patient’s grateful words after a successful repair inspired him to continue the work. She said, “Doctor, you have given me back my life; your reward is in heaven.” Iiyasu has now repaired more than 600 women at the Kano, Zaria and Sokoto Centres. He will be based in Sokoto for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

**Dr. Sunday Lengman**, MBBS, FWACS

*Family Physician/VVF Project Coordinator, Evangel Hospital, Jos*

Dr. Lengman treated his first fistula patient as a post-graduate resident. It was not until years later, while working in family and reproductive health at Evangel Hospital, that he became a fistula surgeon. When the coordinator of hospital’s fistula project left his post, Lengman recalled his experiences with fistula patients as a resident – “how really transformed they are, and the joy on their faces when they are healed.” Determined to fill the vacant position, Lengman acquired the necessary skills and was gradually able to do all types of fistula repair. As the project coordinator at Evangel Hospital, he also raises awareness of fistula in communities and is looking to strengthen rehabilitative care for patients. Dr. Lengman will be based in Kano for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

**Dr. A.G. Mairiga**, MBBS, FWACS

*Consultant Obstetrician/Gynaecologist, University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital, Maiduguri*

Dr. Mairiga first became a fistula surgeon in 1998. Having seen many women with fistula arrive at the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital, he felt driven to do something about it. Mairiga sought training from Dr. Kees Waaldijk. In his current work at the hospital, he sees about 20 to 30 cases annually. He knows there would be many more cases if the hospital offered less expensive services. “In our community, there are so many, and they are all poor,” he says. “They rely on us. So we are trying to make sure that we can provide the surgery at a cost that they can afford.” Dr. Mairiga will be based in Sokoto for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

**Dr. Said Ahmad Muhammad**, MBBS PhD

*Consultant Obstetrician/Gynaecologist, General Hospital, Dutse*

Dr. Said received his certificate in fistula surgery in 1993 and has since treated more than 2,500 women with this condition. He has been instrumental in making fistula treatment services available in Jigawa state and has established a fistula unit at the Federal Medical Centre in Birnin Kudu – the first dedicated fistula centre in Jigawa. Dr. Said serves as the statewide coordinator for fistula and is active in efforts to prevent fistula by training doctors, midwives and community health workers in life saving skills. He will be based in Kano for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

**Prof. Oladosu Ojengbede**, BS, MBBS, FWACS, FMCOG, FICS  
*Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University College Hospital, Ibadan*

For thirty years, Professor Ojengbede has looked after fistula patients. He says, “When I saw that fistula patients were neglected, suffering and abandoned, I saw it as a challenge that I had to take up.” It was during his national service in Kano that he first trained in fistula repair. He went on to Ibadan in the late 1970s where he continued to perform fistula surgeries and received further training from the late Prof. Nylander. From 1991 to 1993, he returned to Kano and Katsina and worked with Dr. Kees Waaldijk to train medical residents in fistula repair. Prof. Ojengbede has also worked to raise awareness of the condition by publishing papers, speaking at conferences and serving on the National VVF Task Force. Prof. Ojengbede, who has repaired over 800 women with fistula, will be based in Birnin Kebbi for the Fistula Fortnight.

**Dr. Oladapo Shittu**, MBBS FWACS, FICS  
*Consultant Obstetrician/Gynaecologist, Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Zaria*

As a resident at Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital in Zaria, Dr. Shittu first learned about obstetric fistula from the senior gynaecologists, many of who had vast experience in obstetrics and fistula management. After their departure, he filled the gap by training fourteen junior colleagues in fistula surgery. The hospital, at one time, performed eight to ten fistula surgeries per week. The introduction of user fees has made the surgery unaffordable for many women, and they now perform only one or two per month. Dr. Shittu is currently trying to secure a waiver for the fees, so that women with fistula in Zaria can once again have access to treatment. Dr. Shittu, who has performed over 2,000 fistula repairs, will be based in Birnin Kebbi for the Fistula Fortnight.

**Dr. Kees Waaldijk**, MD PhD  
*Chief Consultant Surgeon, Babbar Ruga Fistula Centre, Katsina and Laure Fistula Centre, Kano*

For the past 20 years, Dutch surgeon Dr. Kees Waaldijk has worked with the Nigerian government to end fistula. He has surgically repaired more than 14,000 women and has trained many surgeons and nurses in fistula repair. He treats on average seven women per day in several centers in Nigeria and Niger. Training and establishing new centre is one of his key objectives. “You have to give accessibility to your patients,” he says. “Each and every state needs to have its own center. That’s what we’re trying to achieve, but it takes a long time.” In addition to performing surgeries during the fortnight, Dr. Waaldijk has been responsible for training the doctors and nurses, screening many of the patients and has provided invaluable technical support. He will be based in Katsina for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

**Dr. Hassan Ladan Wara**, MBBS  
*Specialist Fistula Surgeon/Obstetric and Gynaecologic Registrar, Federal Medical Centre, Birnin Kebbi*

Dr. Wara has been active in fistula surgery in Sokoto and Kebbi for over a decade. He began his training in Sokoto with the late Professor Ghatak, and continued to perform fistula surgery after moving to Kebbi State in 1991. When a new fistula centre was constructed in Kebbi in 1995, he became its first fistula surgeon. Annually, the centre provides at least 100 fistula operations, with patients coming from Kebbi, neighbouring states and neighbouring countries such as Niger and Benin. Although Dr. Wara is now a consultant for the Federal Medical Centre, he continues to offer his services to the centre free of charge. “Once you see [a fistula patient], you don’t want to stop because you are helping a woman that society has condemned to restore her life and her dignity,” he says. Over the years, Dr. Wara performed about 1,500 surgeries. He will continue to work in Kebbi during the “Fistula Fortnight.”

**Dr. Amir Imam Yola, MBBS**

*Specialist Fistula Surgeon/Senior Medical Officer (Ob/Gyn), Abdullahi Wase Specialist Hospital, Kano*

Dr. Amir was introduced to fistula surgery in 1996. Despite initial doubts about the work, he was later moved to begin training with Dr. Kees Waaldijk after meeting fistula patients. He describes learning the techniques of fistula repair surgery as slow, but systematic: “At first by watching – spinal anaesthesia and how to give it, how to clean and drape a patient for surgery, how to carry out an episiotomy – and then how to repair it.” Through steady training, he gained confidence in fistula surgery and, to date, he has performed approximately 1000 fistula repairs in and around Kano, with a success rate of over 90 percent. Dr. Amir will be based in Kano for the “Fistula Fortnight.”

**Dr. Abdulrasheed Yusuf, MBBS, MPH**

*Specialist Fistula Surgeon, Babbar Ruga Fistula Centre, Katsina*

Dr. Abdulrasheed’s ambition to become a fistula surgeon began when he was a medical student. He found the means to achieve his ambition after his national service, when he began working at the General Hospital in Katsina. He was contacted to begin training with Dr. Kees Waaldijk and has been at the Babbar Ruga Fistula Centre ever since. He performs fistula surgeries (over 700 operated), manages pre- and post-operative care and supports the rehabilitation programmes for the patients. He has also taken part in developing the national strategy for fistula elimination in Nigeria. He urges young doctors to take on the cause of fistula. “For a young medical officer to work in a fistula hospital, it is difficult because we have ambitions – but we have to make the sacrifice to restore these women’s lives.” Dr. Abdulrasheed will be based in Katsina for the Fistula Fortnight.