



# HEARTBREAK. AND HOPE

As countless couples cope with miscarriage, researchers are working to better understand the underlying causes.

## UCLA Team Helps Create Facility for Ugandan Women Who Suffer Childbirth Injuries



A woman who underwent treatment at the Centre for Gynecologic and Fistula Care at Mbarara Hospital in western Uganda.

Imagine experiencing obstructed labor while giving birth in a remote African village with no medical help available. Chances are the baby will die and the woman will suffer an obstetric fistula, a tear between the bladder and rectum that results in constant leakage of urine and sometimes stool. Left untreated, the woman faces a lifetime of social ostracization.

Fistulas are rare in developed nations, where cesarean sections are available. But the World Health Organization estimates that in the East African country of Uganda, about 200,000 women are living with fistulas,

and that about 2,000 new cases occur annually. But with the help of a team from UCLA Health, the new Centre for Gynecologic and Fistula Care at Mbarara Hospital in western Uganda recently opened to expand the capacity to treat this debilitating childbirth injury.

The 50-bed facility has been a long-term goal of supporters since 2009. Under the umbrella of the nonprofit organization Medicine for Humanity, Christopher Tarnay, MD (RES '98, FEL '00), chief of female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery, and a team of UCLA doctors, nurses and medical students have been traveling to Mbarara Hospital annually for two-week surgical trips to treat up to 50 women each time.



**Top:** Surgical training remains a major focus for the UCLA team in Uganda, as Dr. Christopher Tarnay reviews concepts. **Bottom Left:** Ugandan surgeon Dr. Musa Kayondo and Dr. Tarnay, president of Medicine for Humanity, which assisted with the opening of the fistula care center. **Bottom Center:** UCLA team members with Ugandan obstetrics and gynecology residents during fistula training program. **Bottom Right:** Dr. Tarnay with his wife LanAnh Do, MD '96 (RES '04, FEL '00), during the opening of the new center.

Photos: Molly Marler

During those trips, the UCLA team trained local doctors, so that more women can be treated year-round. The new ward is the next step in helping create a sustainable program.

“These patients just want to be able to wake up with a dry bed,” Dr. Tarnay says. “By offering our expertise, training local doctors and now helping our Ugandan colleagues create the beautiful new space, we’ve been able to build a true center of excellence.”

The center will serve as a care and recovery facility for women undergoing surgery to repair fistulas and allow them to convalesce in comfort and privacy. The existing ward had only six beds and was not

big enough to handle the number of patients, some of whom had been sleeping on floors and in corridors.

Medicine for Humanity raised more than \$100,000 to build the new center and helped oversee the design and construction. Dr. Tarnay was overwhelmed when he saw the new building in person. “To see the center completed, when just two years ago it was only a hope, was quite miraculous,” he says. “I got a bit emotional when I went over early to see it before the ribbon-cutting ceremony. I was with my wife and our foundation executive director, and we just stood in shock at what we helped build.”