



# How Should Obstetric Fistula Treatment Be Delivered? An Evaluation Of Fistula Centres

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## BACKGROUND:

- Obstetric fistula is a neglected disease of women and girls, who can suffer social isolation and rejection from husbands as a result of this preventable and treatable condition<sup>1</sup>
- Obstetric fistula is an abnormal opening between the vagina and the rectum or bladder, leading to incontinence and infection<sup>1</sup>
- Obstetric fistulas typically occur as a complication of prolonged obstructed labour, usually in low- and middle-income countries where emergency obstetric care is lacking<sup>2</sup>
- 1-2 million women worldwide suffer from obstetric fistula, with 50,000-100,000 new cases each year<sup>1</sup>
- Various barriers to care mean that only 1 in 50 receive the necessary surgical treatment<sup>1</sup>
- Where and how to best provide treatment has been debated

## AIMS:

1. Identify the main approaches to providing surgical treatment for obstetric fistula
2. Evaluate fistula centres, identifying key themes from the literature

## METHODS:

- Publications retrieved from PubMed and SCOPUS
- Search terms: (obstetric fistula) AND (hospital OR centre OR center)
- Inclusion criteria: English language; Population – all women with obstetric fistula; Topic - focus on provision of obstetric fistula care
- Exclusion criteria: Topic - Focus on co-morbidities, provision of emergency obstetric care, prevention of obstetric fistula
- Aim 1: information on centre providing treatment retrieved
- Aim 2: limitations and advantages of approaches retrieved, and analysed by theme

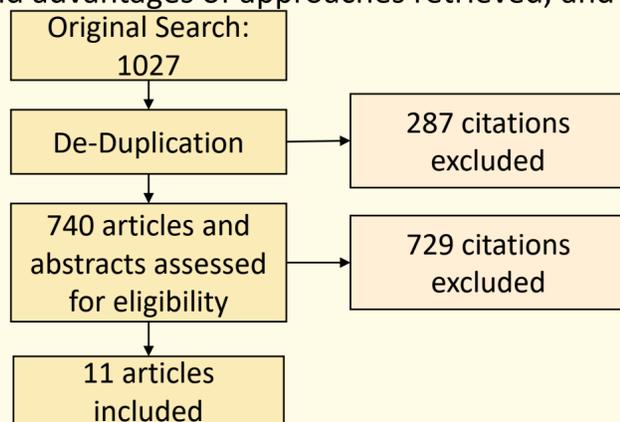


Fig.1 Study Selection

## RESULTS:

**AIM 1:** 4 main approaches to providing obstetric fistula treatment:

1. Fistula Camps	2. Surgery ships	3. District Hospitals	4. Specialised Fistula Treatment Centres
Short term provision, commonly by NGOs	Notably, Mercy Ships <sup>3</sup> Typically docked in one location for a period of months	Integrated hospital-based fistula care services	Centres exclusively for treating women with obstetric fistula

Table 1. Description of the types of obstetric fistula treatment centres

**AIM 2:** Thematic analysis of obstetric fistula centres:

**FUNDING**

- Camps and ships simpler to fund than long-term centres
- External, long-term funding often necessary for appropriate facilities and staff in district hospitals<sup>4</sup>
- Success of specialist centres, ships and camps improved by funding of patient transport costs<sup>5,6</sup>

**RE-INTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY**

- Specialist centres provide holistic approach – teaching of skills for employment<sup>7,8</sup>
- “Fistula champions” and local advocates develop from specialist centres<sup>4</sup>
- Fistula camps and surgical ships do not provide long-term follow up<sup>9</sup>

**QUALITY OF CARE**

- Specialist staff trained to treat complex cases<sup>4</sup>
- Treatment from ships or camps – limited given short-term<sup>10</sup>
- District hospitals quipped mainly for simple fistula cases only<sup>11</sup>

**ACCESS TO TREATMENT**

- Travel costs greater with camps/ships or specialist centres<sup>9</sup>
- Camps/ships rely on radio or TV advertisements to reach women<sup>3</sup>
- Greater access to district hospitals than specialist centres<sup>4</sup>

**TRAINING AND SUSTAINABILITY**

- Specialist centres provide opportunities for training local people to provide fistula care<sup>12</sup>
- Long-term impact of ships and camps limited<sup>12</sup>

Fig.2 Thematic evaluation of issues in providing fistula treatment

## CONCLUSIONS

- 4 main types of fistula centre identified from the literature
- Limitations and advantages of each of these types can be summarised into the following themes:
  - ❖ Funding
  - ❖ Re-integration into society
  - ❖ Quality of care
  - ❖ Access to treatment
  - ❖ Training and sustainability
- Although there is variety in provision of care within each category of fistula centre, a broad summary of thematic analysis of each approach is shown below:

### FISTULA CAMPS:



### SURGERY SHIPS:



### DISTRICT HOSPITALS:



### SPECIALISED FISTULA TREATMENT CENTRES:



Key:

Poor



Excellent



### Implications:

- There is a striking paucity of literature evaluating approaches to tackle this devastating but neglected disease
- Camps and surgical ships are less likely to improve access to treatment in the long-term
- Improving treatment provision by specialist centres and district hospitals, will require increased funding for travel costs and staff/facilities, respectively

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