



# WALSHS

## 2025 Medical Bursary **DR HANNAH RIENKS**

**WINNER**

**\$10,000**



## Dr Hannah Rienks - Professional Bio

Dr Rienks is an Obstetrics and Gynaecology Advanced Trainee at Gold Coast University Hospital. She has long been interested in improving the health of women in areas of need, both globally and in Australia's regions. This passion has lead her to apply for and recently be accepted into Urogynaecology subspeciality training, which will provide invaluable knowledge and surgical skills to assist women with pelvic floor disorders.

Women in limited resource areas around the world give birth in their villages with medical help several days' walk away. In cases of obstructed labour, where the birth does not progress and the baby is trapped in the birthing canal, rather than the prompt recourse to caesarean section available in developed nations, these women have no choice but to continue labouring in excruciating pain, on average for four days. The result of these obstructed labours is unfortunately a stillborn baby, and severe injuries to the pelvis and birthing canal of the woman.

An obstetric fistula is an abnormal communication between the vagina and the bladder or the bowel, formed by the prolonged pressure of the baby on the mother's tissues during these labours. As a result, these young women leak urine or faeces uncontrollably through their vagina. They smell, develop infections, and thus are ostracised from their families and often left by their husbands. Average household income in Uganda is approximately US\$3/day. The country does not have a public healthcare system, thus the out of pocket cost for a fistula surgery of US\$300 is well out of reach for these women, sentencing them to a life of incontinence and isolation.

In August 2025 Dr Rienks will be travelling to Kagando Hospital in western Uganda to learn the intricacies of performing obstetric fistula and prolapse surgeries in the context of extreme resource limitation, from the esteemed Professor Judith Goh and Professor Hannah Krause. All surgeons on this trip are self funded in their attendance and thus the generous Walshs Medical Bursary will go directly to paying the surgical costs of women whose awful predicaments with fistula and prolapse are transformed by their surgical repairs.

