2023

igniting hope
multiplying impact
Amadou, the first patient to receive surgery on the Global Mercy, and his mother, Mariatou, board the ship.

Khadidiatou, maxillofacial patient, before surgery. Read her story on page 14.
Foreword

Mission

Mercy Ships follows the 2,000-year-old model of Jesus, bringing hope and healing to the world’s forgotten poor.

Vision

Mercy Ships uses hospital ships to transform individuals and serve nations.

Values

• Love God
• Love and serve others
• Be people of integrity
• Strive for excellence in all we say and do

Impact

Each year, 16.9 million people around the world die due to lack of access to surgical care. Mercy Ships deploys hospital ships to provide free surgeries. Since 1990, Mercy Ships has conducted 44 field services in 14 African countries, most of which are ranked by the United Nations Development Index as the least developed in the world. In addition to surgical care, Mercy Ships creates lasting impact by providing surgical and anesthetic care as well as education and training across the surgical ecosystem.

It is clear that God’s hand was upon Mercy Ships in 2023 — we accomplished much for the good of our patients, our ships, and our partners in Africa.

The Global Mercy docked in Dakar to serve both Senegal and The Gambia, providing hope and healing to those unable to access lifesaving, transformative surgical care. She then sailed to Sierra Leone, where we witnessed many miracles. Well done, crew of the Global Mercy!

Meanwhile, the Africa Mercy spent most of 2023 in Durban for an extensive refit, receiving updates to her hospital, technology, accommodations, and structure so she can operate for years to come. In February 2024, she arrived in Madagascar for our fourth field service there since 1996.

We have made strides toward our goal of having a physical presence in Africa with the Africa Service Center. We are grateful for the work that the ASC has done so far in reaching out to African governments, forging and strengthening partnerships that are crucial bonds for building a lasting support structure.

We’re also seeing the fruits of our new programmatic strategy of focusing on Education, Training, and Advocacy. Our work is becoming more and more effective as evidenced by long-term projects in Guinea, with Université Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry, and in Sierra Leone with Connaught Hospital, the Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons, and the West African College of Surgeons.

The statistics around the lack of surgical care in sub-Saharan Africa are staggering. But we need not allow the big numbers to deter us. Just one person whose life is changed will change a family; it will change a community. We want to show Jesus’ love and provide hope in what is often a hopeless situation.

When you read through this annual report, I hope you see and feel our heart for each and every one of these people. I pray that God fills you with joy at the work He has done, at the work He is doing, and at the work He will do in the coming year. Because of all of you, Mercy Ships is equipped to bring more hope and healing than ever before.

Gert van de Weerdhof
As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for all we have been blessed with to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus to so many.

During my first year as Chair, I was honored to serve this wonderful organization and to witness lives transformed through not one but two field services on the Global Mercy — first in Senegal, where we also welcomed patients from The Gambia, and then in Sierra Leone. Over the course of the year, we saw firsthand how the true impact of safe surgical care can build over time, touching many more lives than just the individuals who received treatment.

Our return to Sierra Leone, 30 years after our very first visit, was a testament to hope ignited and impact multiplied. We experienced the ripple effects of our long-lasting partnership and its role in strengthening surgical care systems already — and there is so much more to come.

As we continue to improve our focus on lasting change through our Education, Training, and Advocacy programs, we continue to assist our partner nations in developing fully equipped, sustainable surgical care systems ensuring populations have timely access to the treatments they need. In the meantime, we’ll continue supporting their goals, with our eyes focused on our mission: bringing hope and healing, in the 2,000-year-old model of Jesus.

Thank you to all those who have been a part of our work over this past year. I look forward to another season sharing hope and healing together in 2024 as we see our two-ship fleet in service across Africa. There is Hope on the Horizon.

Gary Brown

Friends,

What an immense blessing 2023 has been for us here at Mercy Ships! As I think of the last year, I’m reminded of the countless moments that have touched our hearts and fueled our mission — children who can now walk without pain, families that have reunited because of lifesaving surgery, and communities that have been strengthened through access to healthcare and education. These moments are testimonies to what hope and healing can do.

Stories like these span our 45-year history. Since our beginning in 1978, Mercy Ships has had the honor of following the 2,000-year-old model of Jesus by bringing hope and healing to those in need. Throughout these years, we have remained true to living out our core values of loving and serving others with integrity and excellence. This year, as we mark our 45th year in service, we look back with immense gratitude at all that has been accomplished.

More than 2.8 million lives have been impacted through free surgeries and medical care. More than 42,000 medical and non-medical volunteers from around the world have contributed their expertise and skills to change lives. Thousands of healthcare professionals in developing nations have received vital training and mentorship, creating a sustainable, long-lasting impact. And finally, more than 56 countries have been served, leaving a wave of compassion and healing. But our journey is just beginning!

I am so thankful to share the many accomplishments that you helped make a reality in 2023 and hope as you read through testimonies of compassion, you know how vital you are to our mission.

As we celebrate our 45th anniversary, let us look back with thankfulness at what God has done in us and through us — and let us look ahead with renewed determination. Together, we can create a legacy that will endure for generations.

Thank you for being a part of this incredible journey. Together, we have achieved so much, and together, we can achieve so much more.

Following the model of Jesus,

Don Stephens
2023 in Review:
Igniting Hope; Multiplying Impact

For Mercy Ships, 2023 was a year of renewed hope and impact reverberating through decades. In just one year, we had the opportunity to serve the people of three different nations through life-changing surgical care and medical training.

We started off 2023 by returning the Global Mercy to Dakar, Senegal to begin her first surgical field service, where she welcomed patients from both Senegal and The Gambia. A moment years in the making took place as 4-year-old Amadou climbed the gangway in search of healing — the first patient to ever receive surgery on board the purpose-built new vessel.

Weeks later, Amadou walked down the same gangway — this time with straightened legs, a joyful smile, and confidence for the future.

For crew on board and our Mercy Ships community around the world, Amadou’s journey was a celebration full of praise to the God who made it possible. It marked not only one life transformed, but the first of many to come on the Global Mercy.

After a five-month field service in Senegal, where 736 patients received healing and approximately 600 healthcare professionals were trained across Senegal and The Gambia, the Global Mercy sailed to Sierra Leone. Her arrival in Freetown was a true homecoming, marking the sixth Mercy Ships field service over the course of 30 years to this partner nation.

Meanwhile, hope continues to build as even more impact awaits. The Africa Mercy spent this year undergoing extensive refit in South Africa, preparing to bring life-changing care to Madagascar in 2024. In Guinea, continued training and mentoring, as well as the ongoing construction of an expanded dental training facility, have made safe surgical care more accessible to many.

Thank you for being part of year filled with new beginnings.

See the monumental impact just one year can make in our 2023 Year in Review video.

IMAGE: Amadou, the first patient on board the Global Mercy, during his final discharge.
Around 100 years ago, Rachel Buckingham’s grandmother became a doctor at a time when some universities in the U.K. still barred women from qualifying as physicians. A century later, Dr. Buckingham is following in her grandmother’s medical focused footsteps as an orthopedic surgeon and has performed the first-ever surgery on the Global Mercy.

While Dr. Buckingham performed her surgeries, she also trained a Moroccan orthopedic surgeon alongside her, who is committed to staying in Senegal to treat the Senegalese people.

“Senegal has not got a [known] pediatric orthopedic surgeon. I am hopeful he will be their first,” shared Dr. Buckingham.

Just as her grandmother did before her, Dr. Buckingham’s determination and courage are seeing her change the lives of those in the most urgent need.

**Meet the Volunteer Surgeon Behind the Global Mercy’s First Surgery**

Around 100 years ago, Rachel Buckingham’s grandmother became a doctor at a time when some universities in the U.K. still barred women from qualifying as physicians. A century later, Dr. Buckingham is following in her grandmother’s medical focused footsteps as an orthopedic surgeon and has performed the first-ever surgery on the Global Mercy.

While Dr. Buckingham performed her surgeries, she also trained a Moroccan orthopedic surgeon alongside her, who is committed to staying in Senegal to treat the Senegalese people.

“Senegal has not got a [known] pediatric orthopedic surgeon. I am hopeful he will be their first,” shared Dr. Buckingham.

Just as her grandmother did before her, Dr. Buckingham’s determination and courage are seeing her change the lives of those in the most urgent need.

**Finding His Place and Purpose On Board**

Volunteer David Sandberg spent a year working on fishing boats in his home country of Sweden, so he was accustomed to the maritime life. But stepping on board the Global Mercy was like entering a different world: “It’s another life at sea here.”

On board, David found a life rich with friendship, songs, prayer, and praise. “People of all different personalities, people of all different outlooks on life,” he said. “That’s what I think makes Mercy Ships great.”

Through the community, he’s also found a greater purpose in his daily work as a mariner. “When you do the job, think about what this will accomplish,” he said. “Even if you work as a deckie, maybe don’t get seen a lot … you will save lives.”

**Bringing Transformation Home | David Kpakiwa**

The critical need for surgical care in David Kpakiwa’s home country of Sierra Leone has always felt tangible.

“When I was a kid, my mum got sick and she needed surgery... but in our community, they could not provide that.”

David began working long hours on the farm to support his family at the age of 8. Although his mother was finally able to get the help she needed, David never forgot the experience: “The memories are there. They’re fresh.”

David’s family is not unique. With fewer than 3 surgeons for every 100,000 people, estimates of the unmet surgical need in Sierra Leone reach as high as 91%.

That’s why, years later, as David prepared the way for the Global Mercy to arrive in Freetown, his job felt personal.

David first joined Mercy Ships as a volunteer in 2020. After learning that the Global Mercy would be traveling to Sierra Leone, he asked to join the Country Engagement Team as operations liaison. As part of the team paving the way for the ship to come to Sierra Leone, David’s journey home had now begun.

“I honestly cannot express how much happier I am that I could actually serve my country. I look back and say, ‘Oh, God has been faithful.’”

“Most of all, he’s excited to see lives transformed, for many more patients just like his mother.”
One Port, Two Nations

In February 2023, the Global Mercy sailed into the Port of Dakar, Senegal to begin her very first surgical field service. Arriving in Africa and welcoming patients on board meant the realization of years of hoping, praying, and trusting in God’s plans for this vessel. Finally, this purpose-built hospital ship was fulfilling her lifesaving mission.

During the five-month field service in Dakar, Mercy Ships served two nations — Senegal and The Gambia — through one port, leading to many unforgettable life transformations.

As the Global Mercy departed after the close of a successful field service in June 2023, it was a bittersweet goodbye. Senegal has been a tremendous partner to Mercy Ships through these years. It was in this partner nation that we christened the Global Mercy and hosted the Africa Celebration in 2022. It was also the site of the agreement of the Dakar Declaration, a commitment of African nations to strengthening access to surgical, obstetric, and anesthetic care in the coming years.

We celebrate not only our enduring partnership with Senegal, but also the collaborative spirit of the government to enable Mercy Ships to serve The Gambia this year.

“It [surgery] is life-changing. It has a ripple effect in the individual’s life, in the community, and in the family’s life.”

— Dr. Ahmadou Lamin Samateh, Minister of Health of The Gambia

See the story behind our field service in Senegal and The Gambia here.
Malang was 2 years old when his legs started curving outward.

“I was very sad when I saw Malang walking like that. Sometimes his friends would run and leave him behind, and he’d cry,” said his father, Sadio.

However, a glimmer of hope appeared when Sadio learned Malang could receive help on board the Global Mercy.

Surgery was the first step of many in Malang’s transformation journey as intensive rehabilitation stretched before him. Yet Sadio’s support remained unwavering. They celebrated together when Malang’s casts were finally removed, and he stood tall. Malang’s journey toward a limitless future had begun!

Starting to Recognize Herself

“It’s been almost eight years…I don’t remember how my face looked without it,” said 35-year-old Khadidiatou about the pear-sized tumor on her jaw. As a wife and mother of seven, the growing tumor began affecting her ability to care for her family and she withdrew into herself.

But after surgery on the Global Mercy, Khadidiatou’s subdued personality began to change and blossom.

“I can start to recognize myself,” she said, celebrating her restored beauty. “I compared my photo from before and compared it to the one after... they are not the same.”

Saikou, the First Patient from The Gambia

Last year, 79 patients from The Gambia walked up the gangway of the Global Mercy to receive life-transforming care. And it all started with 4-year-old Saikou.

Little Saikou suffered from knocked knees that made mobility difficult. His mother, Jainaba, knew that access to surgery would change her son’s future. So she and Saikou decided to make the 14-hour journey to the ship in search of healing.

“My son is going to have surgery,” Jainaba said, celebrating when they arrived at the Global Mercy: “I am grateful!”

Samba’s journey to hope and healing was a long one — but for this 56-year-old, it was worth the wait.

His cleft lip had brought Samba unwanted attention his whole life, so he had learned to live in the shadows. But since his healing on board the Global Mercy, he shared that neighbors and friends have begun to rally around him in a way he’d never experienced. “It changed a lot — I’ve changed. I don’t look like the man I used to be,” he celebrated after returning home to his farm in rural Senegal.

“There is undoubtedly a change in his eyes,” marveled Dr. David Chong, the volunteer surgeon from Australia who performed Samba’s cleft lip surgery. “It’s just the soul coming from his eyes as he realizes who he is — maybe not even who he is, but who people can see him to be now.”

The Long-Awaited Journey to Healing

“Working on the ship really feels like, to a much greater degree, medicine as it’s supposed to be. You can see more directly the impact on patients, and on their families, and on their communities.”

– Dr. Mark Shrime, Mercy Ships International Chief Medical Officer

Watch Samba’s story here.
Bringing Education, Training, and Advocacy to Senegal and The Gambia

We are grateful for the ways God worked through Education, Training, and Advocacy programs in 2023. Valuable training programs took place in Senegal and The Gambia, leading to more than 600 healthcare professionals strengthening skills and learning new ones. This focus on long-term education and individual growth ensures a lasting impact and sustainable development for surgical systems in Senegal and The Gambia.

### Average Participant Hours per Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional Agriculture</td>
<td>244 hrs</td>
<td>41 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anesthesia Providers</td>
<td>89.0 hrs</td>
<td>2 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeon Mentoring</td>
<td>101.0 hrs</td>
<td>7 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Skills Project</td>
<td>4.6 hrs</td>
<td>62 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterile Processing</td>
<td>32.1 hrs</td>
<td>10 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Courses</td>
<td>22.4 hrs</td>
<td>95 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Trauma Care Courses</td>
<td>17 hrs</td>
<td>53 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical Technicians</td>
<td>13.6 hrs</td>
<td>8 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia Mobile Courses</td>
<td>12.2 hrs</td>
<td>64 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Ship Surgical Nurse Mentoring</td>
<td>9.9 hrs</td>
<td>80 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential Pain Management</td>
<td>7.5 hrs</td>
<td>83 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Surgery Courses</td>
<td>7.1 hrs</td>
<td>116 participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a young boy, Dr. Abraham Camara was puzzled when neighbors came to seek medical help from his father, a high school teacher.

“He was the only person who had gone to university, and he worked for the government... so they thought he would know a lot about healthcare,” explained Dr. Camara.

His father embraced the responsibility, offering help and guidance. Watching his father in action planted a dream to go into medicine: “I wanted to change lives and help, just like my father.”

For the past 12 years, Dr. Camara has been working toward becoming a specialized surgeon. But first, he needed more training.

He connected with the Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons (PAACS), an organization Mercy Ships partners with to provide an opportunity for PAACS residents to experience specialized residency rotations on board the hospital ships.

Through this partnership, Dr. Camara boarded the Global Mercy to train with South African reconstructive plastics surgeon Dr. Tertius Venter in the operating room over the course of six weeks. Scrubbing in alongside Dr. Venter was an opportunity to learn from an expert in the field and expand his understanding of quality patient care.

He departed the ship confident about the future impact he can make as a surgeon, armed with skills honed through years of training — and the compassion he first learned from his father.

---

**Image:** Dr. Abraham Camara (right), operates alongside reconstructive plastic surgeons, Dr. Tertius Venter (center) and Dr. Guido Köhler (left).
A Special Homecoming in Sweet Salone

Thanks to an invitation from the government of Sierra Leone, Mercy Ships arrived in the Port of Freetown in August 2023 to begin a 10-month field service. This marked the sixth Mercy Ships visit to this beautiful country over the course of 30 years — and the very first visit for the Global Mercy.

We finished the year at the halfway point of our time in Sierra Leone with 712 patients welcomed on board and 1,132 surgical procedures already performed. Hope and healing came to life in the wards as patients recovered from long-awaited surgeries. This year, surgical specialties included maxillofacial and ENT, reconstructive plastics, ophthalmic, pediatric specialized general, and general.

In 2024, we are excited to continue our field service in Sierra Leone and make surgical care accessible to many more.

Every single surgery that takes place on board is more than just a number. It represents a new beginning in someone’s life — and means restored hope and freedom for their families and communities.

“It's a privilege for us to be able to host the president and the ministers of cabinet that we had today ... it signifies a partnership between us in Mercy Ships and the people in the nation of Sierra Leone. It's wonderful to be together on this mission.”

— Joff Williams
Global Mercy Managing Director

NOTE:
A patient often has multiple procedures as part of a single surgery and may also have multiple surgeries.

Watch the Global Mercy’s exciting welcome to Sierra Leone.
Expanding Sierra Leone’s Surgical Capacity through Education, Training, and Advocacy

In addition to providing surgical care on board, Mercy Ships was committed to helping strengthen Sierra Leone’s surgical and anesthetic systems. In 2023, 54 healthcare professionals received in-depth training and mentoring across areas like nurse anesthesia and peri-operative nursing. We welcomed all the surgical and anesthesia residents in Sierra Leone on board for training alongside our hospital teams. Mercy Ships worked in collaboration with the leadership of Sierra Leone, as well as partners like Connaught Hospital in Freetown, the Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons, and the West African College of Surgeons, to make these education opportunities possible.

An ongoing partnership with Connaught Hospital in Freetown opened the doors to 43 local healthcare professionals receiving hands-on training on board throughout the field service.

Mercy Ships is sponsoring five Sierra Leonean dental students to study at a partner dental school, Université Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry in Guinea, in order to bring dental care and education back home.

“God With Us”: Emmanuel’s Story

Emmanuel, the first patient to come on board the Global Mercy in Sierra Leone, walked up the gangway hopeful that surgery would remove a tumor that had weighed on his life. With his 43rd birthday taking place days earlier, Emmanuel celebrated his “double portion of blessings.”

After four years of struggle, the surgery to remove Emmanuel’s tumor took just 48 minutes. He had kept the surgery a surprise — but one look at himself afterwards had him calling his family to share the good news!

New Hope for Naserry

Naserry was a joyful child, even after her arm was severely burned in a farming accident. Her aunt Salamatu has high hopes for her niece, who dreams of becoming a lawyer one day, but school has been tough — not academically, but socially. Other kids tease her for her disability, although Salamatu contends that Naserry can do more with one hand than they can with two.

After finally receiving surgery to heal her arm, one can only imagine how much Naserry will be able to accomplish.

Scan to hear more from Dr. Kabba.

“God With Us”: Emmanuel’s Story

Emmanuel, the first patient to come on board the Global Mercy in Sierra Leone, walked up the gangway hopeful that surgery would remove a tumor that had weighed on his life. With his 43rd birthday taking place days earlier, Emmanuel celebrated his “double portion of blessings.”

After four years of struggle, the surgery to remove Emmanuel’s tumor took just 48 minutes. He had kept the surgery a surprise — but one look at himself afterwards had him calling his family to share the good news!

New Hope for Naserry

Naserry was a joyful child, even after her arm was severely burned in a farming accident. Her aunt Salamatu has high hopes for her niece, who dreams of becoming a lawyer one day, but school has been tough — not academically, but socially. Other kids tease her for her disability, although Salamatu contends that Naserry can do more with one hand than they can with two.

After finally receiving surgery to heal her arm, one can only imagine how much Naserry will be able to accomplish.

Scan to hear more from Dr. Kabba.
In 2023, we adapted our programmatic strategy to focus our work on developing relationships with key partners in Africa, formalizing educational opportunities on board our vessels, and designing projects to measure outcome and impact. Mercy Ships has long been committed to training and education, so this foundation was already in place, but this year we deepened our focus on long-term surgical education in our African partner nations.

This includes establishing lasting partnerships with universities in host nations to offer joint programs, such as the Guinean students currently earning specialized dental degrees in Morocco. It also entails working toward providing six-month to one-year fellowships focused on specialized surgical training in areas not available in the host country. In Sierra Leone, these residencies are underway, with professionals already participating in anesthesia and nursing residencies.

Mercy Ships’ direct advocacy activities include peer-reviewed scientific publications about the work that we do, and having a presence at international meetings such as the G4 Alliance, the UN General Assembly, and the World Health Assembly. The overarching goal is to activate and further develop surgical and anesthesia education, and strengthen surgical ecosystems and health policy. We also support the rollout and adoption of the Dakar Declaration by the African Union, as spearheaded by signatory countries.

“Using the ship as the catalyst, we are going to grow our investments in land-based, long-term projects and are looking forward to seeing how Mercy Ships can partner to see each country’s vision for surgical care realized.”

– Erin Muyres,
Senior Director of Education, Training, and Advocacy

Hear from Mercy Ships’ CMO Dr. Shrime about the new programmatic strategy.
Impact and Partnership Across Africa

Mercy Ships’ programs, partnerships, and projects across Africa this year led to lives transformed and lasting impact. While our hospital ships were actively serving Senegal, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone through the course of the year, the work didn’t stop there. With approximately nine in ten people lacking access to safe, timely, and affordable surgical care in sub-Saharan Africa, we aim to make a difference for as many as we can through our country engagement model. In 2023, this included:

**Senegal**
Volunteers helped 657 Senegalese patients receive surgery. In addition, 518 healthcare participants were trained in 2023.

**The Gambia**
A total of 79 patients from The Gambia received surgery through the Port of Dakar, as well as 140 healthcare professionals receiving training.

**Sierra Leone**
In August, the Global Mercy arrived in Freetown for a 10-month field service, beginning with 1,132 surgical procedures in the latter half of the year.

**Liberia**
Anesthesia machine donations and anesthesia training for 354 participants will lead to safer surgical practices in Liberia, while follow-up nutritional agriculture training for 24 Food for Life participants promotes healthier futures for their communities.

**Benin**
63 Food For Life participants received training in nutritional agriculture, and 101 participants expanded their skills through an Essential Pain Management course and Training of Trainers course.

**Madagascar**
In Madagascar, the Country Engagement Team paved the way for next year’s field service, including organizing upcoming patient assessment and selection.

**South Africa**
A series of 8 SAFE obstetrics and pediatric courses for 223 participants, as well as the refit of the Africa Mercy, took place in South Africa this year.

---

“Since I was 12, I have been dreaming about a place where people can come to have surgery or other treatments... I want to have a place like that in Africa where if I go there, I’m sure that things will be good. The goal is not just doing something but doing something at the best level.”

– Dr. Abida Ngandjio Sidi, mentee surgeon
In 2023, Mercy Ships activated a Country Engagement Team (CET) based in Madagascar to prepare the way for the Africa Mercy's arrival in February 2024. This long-term country engagement model is part of Mercy Ships’ approach of building lasting relationships and modifying our approach to fit the unique needs and goals of each partner nation. A key piece of our engagement in Madagascar included laying the foundation for upcoming patient assessment and selection across different regions of the country once the ship arrives. Mercy Ships aims to provide free surgeries for a range of surgical specialties as well as targeted training for healthcare professionals. This will build upon a legacy of impact in the country. Over the course of our three previous field services, more than 6,425 surgical procedures and 52,397 dental procedures were performed in Madagascar. More than 2,000 healthcare professionals have received training.

“The Africa Service Center (ASC) is set up to have a regional presence in Africa, which also supports the Country Engagement Teams. In the coming year we hope to build out the ASC further.”

— Bernard van den Bosch, Africa Service Center Director
Since 2018, Mercy Ships has sustained a long-term partnership with Université Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry (UGANC) dental school. This initially involved supporting the renovation and equipping of the dentistry department, including building a dental simulation room, training lab, and clinical suite. This partnership also includes direct training and mentoring of dental students, supporting dental school graduates to open their own clinics in rural areas of Guinea, and partnering with NGO Hope Ignited to open the first pediatric center of excellence in the country.

In 2023, Mercy Ships continued partnering with UGANC to support a variety of programs in the university, including biomedical technician and nurse anesthesia training, as well as sponsoring nine dental graduates to obtain specialized degrees at a partner university in Morocco. Once these residents complete their studies, they will return to Guinea to become teachers and leaders, passing on their specialized education to the next generation of dentists.

This year, our partnership with UGANC added an exciting new dimension, as we facilitated a new partnership with the University of Sierra Leone (USL) as well. We began supporting five Sierra Leonean dental students to learn French and gain their dental degrees in an exchange program between USL and UGANC. Once they’ve obtained their diplomas, these five dentists will return to Sierra Leone, a nation with only six current practicing dentists, to expand its workforce.

In 2023, Mercy Ships also invested in the construction of a new clinical training center on the UGANC dental school’s campus. Once completed, this building will more than double the current capacity for students to learn, observe, and practice, enabling even more dentists to reach a higher level of dental expertise.

“You need to first put your resources into the people, and then allow them to develop, allow them to mature, allow them to grow, allow them to be the leaders. And then you expand the dental school and now all of a sudden, you have people that are wanting to come and you’re making fantastic dentists throughout the country.”

– Dr. David Ugai,
Mercy Ships
Guinea Country Director

“When you are specialized, you have a field in which you can excel. That is what motivated me to have a field where I can use my competencies. Currently, we are at the bottom of the ladder — but if we have more specialists... it will change dentistry in Guinea.”

– Dr. Adama Tounkara,
Dental Resident

Guinea

Discover how a partnership with one university is transforming the future of dental care in Guinea.
Across Africa

Mercy Ships continued building upon strategic partnerships in Togo with a focus on ophthalmic surgery and training, contributing to sight restored for 1,688 people. These partnerships include supporting Sight.org, a Togo-based NGO, where we contributed to 843 cataract procedures in 2023.

Mercy Ships also continued supporting the cataract surgical training institute of Dr. Wodome, a former Mercy Ships trainee who has become the nation’s leading ophthalmic surgeon. He is now also serving as Mercy Ships Ophthalmic Specialty Consultant. This year, we funded 1,265 cataract procedures at his clinic, as well as supporting the ongoing training of 10 surgical residents.

Mercy Ships conducted a series of eight Safer Anesthetics from Education (SAFE) courses across South Africa this year. Led by Mercy Ships crew and staff, in tandem with partnering hospitals around the country, these eight courses included both SAFE Obstetrics and SAFE Pediatrics. Several of the courses included a Training of Trainers component, equipping course participants to pass on their knowledge and train others in the same material.

In partnership with the Ministry of Health, Mercy Ships came alongside the healthcare system in Liberia to provide anesthesia machine donations and train 354 training participants in 2023. These included a range of courses such as Safe Surgery, Neonatal Resuscitation, Primary Trauma Care, Nurse Training, Nutritional Agriculture, and Mental Health.

As part of its long-term country engagement model, Mercy Ships also conducted a series of follow-up visits to evaluate and monitor the ongoing impact of previous training courses. In 2023, these follow-ups included revisiting previous participants in Nurse Training, Mental Health, Primary Trauma Care, and Food for Life training.

We continued to partner with Lifebox to implement their CleanCut program, which empowers surgical teams in partner hospitals to monitor and evaluate patient outcomes, and also ran a leadership training program in partnership with VID, a Norwegian university.

In Benin, Mercy Ships provided over 66,831 hours of nutritional agriculture training to 63 participants through the Food for Life program. Later in the year, 101 participants expanded their surgical care skills through an Essential Pain Management course. Both courses included a corresponding Training of Trainers component, allowing new knowledge to be passed forward.

In Togo, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Togo.

“Mercy Ships has always been there for the people of Liberia. You’ve made a lot of sacrifices ensuring safe healthcare delivery. You’ve conducted workshops, trainings, and immense donations. Look around the entire country and see how many Glostavent Anesthesia System machines have been donated for safe surgeries!”

– Dr. Wiyatta Diggs, Physician Anesthesia Provider

In Benin, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Benin.

In Togo, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Togo.

In Benin, Mercy Ships provided over 66,831 hours of nutritional agriculture training to 63 participants through the Food for Life program. Later in the year, 101 participants expanded their surgical care skills through an Essential Pain Management course. Both courses included a corresponding Training of Trainers component, allowing new knowledge to be passed forward.

In Togo, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Togo.

In Benin, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Benin.

In Togo, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Togo.

In Benin, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Benin.

In Togo, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Togo.

In Benin, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Benin.

In Togo, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Togo.

In Benin, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Benin.

In Togo, a patient cheers after her sight is restored during a bandage removal in Togo.
Upgrading the Africa Mercy

From March to December 2023, the Africa Mercy underwent a season of maintenance and repair in Durban, South Africa. During this time, the Africa Mercy was refit to extend her lifespan, allowing her to continue serving as a vessel bringing hope and healing for years to come.

The refit touched areas across the entire ship. The hospital was remodeled, and the new radiology, lab, pharmacy, and sterilization equipment was set up. These key hospital updates will allow Mercy Ships to provide an even higher standard of care to patients who come on board the Africa Mercy in the future.

Other primary projects included maintenance of the hull and rudders as well as a complete renovation of the dining room and galley.

The information technology (IT) system was also upgraded, enhancing the ship’s functionality and performance within her operating theaters.

"God has blessed us with an amazing vessel with which to serve as his hands and feet. With regular maintenance, the Africa Mercy is equipped to serve the people of Africa into the 2030s. We are overwhelmed by the amazing partnerships in South Africa that allowed us to continue the rich legacy of the Africa Mercy."

– Robert Corley, Mercy Ships Chief Operating Officer

*Image: The installation of new X-ray and CT machines will enable advanced diagnostic photos, allowing medical crew on board to respond with enhanced speed and accuracy.*

*Image: Volunteer Polynice Gnirassou makes use of new galley additions, including a separate bakery and hospital galley area, as well as brand new ovens to maximize efficiency and food quality.*

*Image: Dining room renovation, included new booths and sound-dampening panels.*

*Image: The Africa Mercy spent a month in dry dock for propeller, shaft, hull, and rudder repairs and cleaning.*
In 2023, Mercy Ships continued building upon its commitment to leaving a lasting impact on the health of people and communities in sub-Saharan Africa, using its state-of-the-art hospital ships and in close collaboration with local partners and stakeholders. In the spirit of our core values to strive for excellence across all areas of operations, we are committed to upholding the highest Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards.

Each Mercy Ships vessel meets or exceeds all international environmental standards and regulations, including those relative to the environment, in particular the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), the main international convention covering prevention of pollution of the marine environment by ships from operational or accidental causes. Mercy Ships’ newest hospital ship, the Global Mercy, was purpose-built with energy efficiency as a major component of her design. It lays a roadmap for Mercy Ships’ commitment to designing future eco-friendly vessels with energy efficiency in mind, expanding our positive impact on African partner nations while minimizing our impact on the environment. To maintain optimum safety and efficiency levels, ship operations are surveyed annually by Lloyd’s Register.

Key features on board the vessel include modern and efficient systems that provide reliable power, clean water, and air conditioning for the hospital and crew, all of which reduce the ship’s total energy consumption relative to earlier generation vessels. Additionally, filtering and treating air conditioning condensate water for technical uses on board reduces total potable water use by approximately 50 percent.

From a social perspective, the core of Mercy Ships’ mission is tangibly improving the lives of individuals and communities through the delivery of direct surgical services and education, training, and advocacy programs to its partner African nations. Since 1978, the organization has used its model of hospital ships to provide more than 117,000 life-changing and lifesaving surgical procedures across a range of surgical specialties that are often inaccessible, unaffordable, or unsafe in the countries we serve. In tandem with these direct medical services, Mercy Ships has trained over 54,300 local professionals in their area of expertise, leading to stronger surgical care systems in the long term.

This transformative work is made possible by a crew of volunteers serving on board as well as staff working around the world, all of whom Mercy Ships is dedicated to supporting as they live out their mission. In 2023, Mercy Ships continued to invest time and resources to assess the workplace culture and ensure staff and volunteers are represented and heard, allowing us to better fulfill our mission and create a work environment where everyone feels valued.

Mercy Ships’ governance model includes oversight from the Mercy Ships International Board of Directors, consisting of men and women with diverse profiles from around the world. The Mercy Ships brand represents our headquarters in Garden Valley, Texas, our hospital ships operating in host countries in Africa, 16 affiliated independent charities around the world under the name Mercy Ships that raise funds and recruit volunteers to staff and run our hospital ships and related operations, and an Africa Service Center headquartered in Dakar, Senegal. Each national office is an independent charity organized under the laws of its respective country, has its own Board of Directors, and complies with each country’s specific legislation for non-profit NGOs. Mercy Ships currently operates a two-ship fleet consisting of the Africa Mercy and the Global Mercy, each of which is led by a Managing Director and management team that reports directly to Mercy Ships’ executive leadership.

As we close another impactful year, we look ahead to bringing hope and healing to even more in 2024 through an active two-ship fleet. In February 2024, the Africa Mercy arrived in Toamasina, Madagascar to begin a 10-month field service, where volunteers will provide safe, free, specialized surgeries on board as well as training to healthcare professionals across the surgical ecosystem. We are honored to be welcomed to build upon years of incredible partnership with Madagascar and continue strengthening the nation’s surgical system together.

Meanwhile, the Global Mercy will complete her field service in Sierra Leone, including providing life-changing and lifesaving surgeries as well as residencies, training, and mentoring opportunities, paving the way for an equipped and empowered Sierra Leonean healthcare workforce. We are grateful for an invite by the President of Sierra Leone to return to Freetown for an additional 8-month field service in 2024. During that time, we will further build upon Education, Training, and Advocacy efforts and provide more surgeries to answer the nation’s great surgical needs.

We are also anticipating an exciting opportunity in Guinea, where we will be expanding our dental training facility at the Université Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry. As we look eagerly to the future, we ask you to join us in praying for all that is to come: for the volunteer professionals needed to staff a two-ship fleet, for successful next steps in five-year country engagement plans, and for all the lives who will come on board for healing.
Since 1978:

2.87 million+ Direct beneficiaries
541,000+ Life-changing surgical procedures
54,300+ Dental procedures
54,300+ Professionals trained in their field of expertise
6,940+ Professionals trained to train others

Dr. Bertha Sereza Ayi
Medical Director of Seplus
Essential Health West
Sioux Falls, SD, USA

Gary Belvin
Boston, MA, USA
Lois Boyle
Glasgow, UK

Dr. Gary Brandenburg
Teaching Pastor
Fellowship Bible Church
Dallas, TX, USA

Lois Boyle
Director of Operations
and Communications
GfK Foundation
Giffnock, Glasgow

James F. Coppens*
Chief Rail and
Communications Officer
Overhead Door Corporation
Duluth, TN, USA

Michael L. Cowan, MD
Vice Admiral, USA (Retired)
Ashburn, VA, USA

Troy A. Griep
Morgan Stanley,
Private Wealth Management
San Francisco, CA, USA

John Paul Ketels*
Senior Partner (Retired)
Clifford Chance
Washington, DC, USA

D. Michael Lindsay, Ph.D
President,
Taylor University,
Upland, IN, USA

David Overton*
Partner
Opus Faveo Innovation
Development
Austin, TX, USA

Dr. Loic Pfister
LPPV Advocats,
Academic Fellow,
Center for Philanthropy
University of Geneva
Lausanne, Switzerland

Lucy Quist
Chief Diversity and Inclusion
Officer & Head of Change
Herfordshire, UK

Filip Rygg
CEO
Frogner, Norway

Daniel O. Shelley
Texas State Senator (Retired)
Attorney at Law
Austin, TX, USA

**Executive Committee Member**

Governance
Mercy Ships International
Board of Directors
The work of Mercy Ships is only possible because of the generosity of our supporters and volunteer professionals.

It is because of you that the lives of the people you see here, as well as so many others, are being changed forever.

Thank you for your faithful and continued support as we work together to change the world forever...

...one life at a time.