



Father is first patient in Sierra Leone to receive life transforming surgery on board Mercy Ship

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE, SEPTEMBER 13, 2023 – A 43-year-old man who feared he would have to live with a tumor on his face for life was the first patient to receive a life-changing surgery on board the world’s largest civilian hospital ship, the *Global Mercy*™ yesterday (Sept 12th) in the Port of Freetown, following the ship’s recent arrival.

Father-of-one Emmanuel thought the small lump in his mouth was just toothache or a cold sore when he discovered it four years ago. But it continued to grow bigger on his lower face and medication did not stop it continuing to enlarge.

He had resigned himself to living with the tumor forever but he constantly worried that it would burst and complicate his health.

Yesterday, the Sierra Leonean who lives in Freetown became the first person to receive one of more than 2,350 surgeries planned for the *Global Mercy*’s 10-month stay in Freetown.

Emmanuel, who has kept the surgery a secret from both his son and father to surprise them after in person, said: “I am so happy to be heading to the ship today. This is one of the happiest days of my life.”

His aunt said: “After surgery I hope he can come back and become a witness for what is possible.”

Currently there are no fully certified maxillofacial specialist surgeons practicing in country for the population of 8.4 million people, according to Dr Mustapha Kabba, Deputy Chief Medical Officer – Clinical Services for Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Health and Sanitation.

Dr Kabba said: “We have primary healthcare systems that are up and running, but we really need specialized people.” He expressed his gratitude for Mercy Ships’ support with difficult surgeries of this nature.

International Chief Medical Officer, American Dr Mark Shrime and Swiss oral and maxillofacial surgeon Dr Didier-David Malis performed the surgery, with Dr Shrime taking the lead. They were supported by a multinational team of professionals, who volunteered their time and expertise on this unique hospital ship.

Australian volunteer Hospital Director Keren Fuhrmeister said: “The first day of surgery for us is the one we’ve all been waiting for, because it shows the start of our journey here.

We are not only providing the surgeries that our patients need, but we want to partner with the country of Sierra Leone to provide mentoring, training, and a platform where we can best serve our patients and strengthen their health system.”

This is the sixth time a Mercy Ship has been in Sierra Leone since 1992. This time, the purpose-built *Global Mercy*, which only began full operations last year, will focus on bringing hope and healing through the following surgical specialties: Maxillofacial, General, Pediatric Specialized General, Orthopedic, Reconstructive Plastics, and Ophthalmology.

The *Global Mercy* is not just a hospital but also a floating training center, that will facilitate hundreds of hours of training in the coming ten months whilst docked in Freetown. Volunteer professionals on board, in collaboration with in-country partners, plan to train more than 200 healthcare professionals in a range of surgical education courses.

Over the course of five previous field services, Mercy Ships has partnered closely with Sierra Leone’s government to provide safe, free surgeries to a total of **9,548** patients.

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About Mercy Ships Canada

Mercy Ships Canada is one of 16 National Offices mandated to raise funds, awareness, identify and implement projects and recruit volunteers for the programs of Mercy Ships internationally. Mercy Ships operates the largest non-governmental hospital ship in the world, providing humanitarian assistance including free life-changing surgeries and health care, training and mentoring of local healthcare professionals, and capital projects to renovate local health facilities, so communities have sustainable healthcare after Mercy Ships departs. Information on Mercy Ships Canada can be found at www.mercyships.ca