



## **Guinea's Sole Public Dental School Unveils Expanded Training Facility to Revolutionize Dental Care Across West Africa**

**CONAKRY, GUINEA 26<sup>th</sup> September 2024:** Guinea's only public dental school celebrated the grand opening of its state-of-the-art training facility yesterday, which more than doubles capacity for dental students to learn, practice and treat patients while addressing the critical gap in accessing dental care.

The new 1500m sq plus expansion at Université Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry (UGANC) marks the end of 20 months of construction and builds on an already thriving program which is paving the way to transform dental care across sub-Saharan Africa as more partners join forces.

Since partnering with international charity Mercy Ships in 2018 to help with the renovation of an existing building, UGANC has transformed its approach to dental training, overcoming previous challenges and setting a new standard for practical, patient-focused education where students receive supervised advanced clinical training on equipment.

Guinea's Minister of Higher Education, Mr Alpha Bacar Barry, who was the first patient to receive dental treatment at the newly-opened clinic, said: "It's one thing to have a gift; it's another thing to make it last. We know that the population in our country is really in need of dental care. This center is appointed to be a response to meet that need, because you cannot talk health if you don't have infrastructure. Having this infrastructure and equipment is a huge blessing for Guinea."

"I call for all students who are true recipients of this great achievement today, to really engage themselves in being serious and working hard in

order to become great dentists for the population who are in need of it. I encourage students and teachers to research to keep improving the health system of Guinea."

He added: "Thank you to Mercy Ships for all the endeavors and engagement and for building this center, which is going to be a great and impactful center of training for dental students in the West African region and beyond."

The new landmark expansion allows the Doctorate in Dental Surgery program to have 30 students per class, which is an overall capacity of more than 210 students. These numbers mark a significant leap in addressing the shortage of dental professionals. [Between 2014 and 2019, the WHO Africa region averaged just 3.3 dentists per 100,000 people—a figure that's about one-tenth of the global ratio.](#)

Before Mercy Ships' involvement, there was no simulation or on-site clinic for students. In 2018-19, the partnership introduced simulation and practical training to students with 4 simulation stations and 10 dental chairs for patient care. The expansion created 30 simulation stations along with 22 dental chairs for patient care and created new labs for practical training and dental prosthodontics. Cutting edge technologies include a CBCT (Cone Beam CT) scanning machine that allows for detailed 3D images to be taken quickly for accurate diagnosis and treatment and an electronic medical management system installed for patient recordkeeping.

Professor Mohamed Cissé, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of UGANC, said: "Guineans are used to going abroad for medical treatment, but with this gem there will be no need to seek treatment abroad. People will be able to get their treatment here. I would simply like to thank Mercy Ships, because they have enabled us to get out of a rut and to become a leading light in terms of dental surgery."

Lead dentist Dr. David Ugai – now the Mercy Ships Country Director in Guinea and the Dental Director of Education and Investment – witnessed the overwhelming scope of the dental need in the nation when he first volunteered with Mercy Ships in Guinea in 2012. There, he watched as the lines of patients seeking dental care continued to grow longer and longer.

He shared at the time: "We could stay in Guinea forever and ever and that line would continue to be there."

Today he celebrates the progress which he says has only come about through strong collaboration and donors who have supported the programs, which also include biomedical training, surgical specialty, and a nurse anesthesia program.

Dr. Ugai said: "We are now in a position of being able to give every single student the ability to go through a training, a curriculum, a process, that meets not just Guinea's standards and accreditation standards, but towards those international accreditation standards in the future."

Darryl Anderson, Executive Director of Mercy Ships Canada, shared "that the Canadian Board was very pleased to authorize investment in this initiative. Under Dr. Ugai's leadership, best practices in international development are being applied, promising to increase the social impact of Mercy Ships' work."

The students studying at UGANC and a related program in Morocco now represent a variety of African nations, such as Benin, Madagascar, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, showcasing the diversity and inclusivity of the initiative. As of September 2024, there are 26 international students enrolled in various student exchange programs at the University, including 11 dental students from Sierra Leone, where Mercy Ships' hospital ship the *Global Mercy*<sup>™</sup> has docked for two subsequent field services from 2023-2025.

Hopes are strong that the highly educated and experienced professionals will return to their home countries and establish new schools of their own and bolster dental care throughout the region.

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### **ABOUT MERCY SHIPS:**

Mercy Ships operates hospital ships that deliver free surgeries and other healthcare services to those with little access to safe medical care. An international faith-based organization, Mercy Ships has focused entirely on partnering with African nations for the past three decades. Working with in-country partners, Mercy Ships also provides training to local healthcare professionals and supports the construction of in-country medical infrastructure to leave a lasting impact.

Each year, more than 2,500 volunteer professionals from over 60 countries serve on board the world's two largest non-governmental hospital ships, the *Africa Mercy*<sup>®</sup> and the *Global Mercy*<sup>™</sup>. Professionals such as surgeons, dentists, nurses, health trainers, cooks, and engineers dedicate their time and skills to accelerate access to safe surgical, obstetric and anesthetic care.

Mercy Ships was founded in 1978 and has offices in 16 countries as well as an Africa Service Center in Dakar, Senegal. For more information, visit [mercyships.ca](http://mercyships.ca) and follow us on social media.

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