



## On World Oral Health Day, Mercy Ships Recognises Australian Dental Volunteers' Contribution to the Oral Health of Africa

Conakry, Guinea, West Africa, March 20, 2019: On World Oral Health Day, Mercy Ships recognises the Australian dental volunteers dedicated to the oral health of West Africa.

Mercy Ships is currently working in Guinea, West Africa with a team of 25 volunteer dentists, dental assistants and dental hygienists from Australia and around the world. Through a partnership with the Guinean Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene, the facilities, areas, and persons for capacity building projects were identified.

The Mercy Ships Medical Capacity Building (MCB) program in dentistry aims to enhance the standards of care within African partner health care institutions. Work also includes mentoring and courses being taught to faculty and students at the Gamal Abdel Nasser University, the only dental school in Guinea. These dental courses contain practical and relevant medical capacity building projects that demonstrate and impart knowledge, skills, and a compassionate, professional attitude to each participant.

The training is essential to help fill the need for more qualified dental professionals. Without access to proper dental care, easily curable dental diseases can deteriorate into serious conditions, some of which require the specialty care of an ENT physician or maxillofacial surgeon. Through past work in Guinea, Mercy Ships has confirmed that lack of access to dental, ENT and maxillofacial care represents a serious need in the country.

Australians involved in the projects in Guinea include Queensland dentists Dr. Toni Mitchell and Dr. Ryan Goh and dental assistant Maryanne Casey, and South Australian dentist Dr. Su Fei Ling and dental assistant Kay Barlow.

"The people of Guinea and other nations in West Africa face many problems – lack of food, water, shelter, sanitation and access to health care and education. It's good to be able to train the local people who will then be able to provide care for their own," said Dr. Toni Mitchell from Mission Beach.

"I had the opportunity of helping to train a local person in tooth extraction. We could not communicate because of the language barrier but he learnt by watching. I feel greatly rewarded as the people I serve give back more than I could ever give personally."

The Mercy Ships Dental Team has treated over 5,000 dental patients in a free clinic available to citizens since the Africa Mercy, the world's largest private hospital ship, arrived in Guinea in August 2018.

To date, 13 dentists and 41 dental students have participated in the mentoring and training program which will continue the entire 10 months that the Africa Mercy is docked in Guinea.

After the field service ends this coming June, Mercy Ships will hand over the fully-renovated, equipped and fully-functioning dental clinic designed to meet the training needs of Gamal's dental students, ensuring future generations of Guinean dentists are properly equipped to enter the local dental workforce and provide quality care to patients.

Mercy Ships will remain engaged in this project for one to three years afterwards to assure the project's sustainability, evaluating how the level of skills and knowledge are being used and shared, while carefully identifying any external variables that may positively or negatively affect the project's overall success. Mercy Ships uses this information for continual project design improvements in future field services.

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About Mercy Ships

Mercy Ships uses hospital ships to deliver free, world-class health care services, capacity building and sustainable development aid to those without access in the developing world. Founded in 1978, Mercy Ships has worked in more than 70 countries providing services valued at more than \$1.3 billion, with more than 2.6 million direct beneficiaries. Each year, more than 1,200 volunteers from over 40 nations serve with Mercy Ships. Professionals including surgeons, dentists, nurses, health care trainers, teachers, cooks, seamen, engineers, and agriculturalists donate their time and

skills to the effort. Mercy Ships seeks to transform individuals and serve nations one at a time. Mercy Ships Australia, one of 16 international support offices, is based on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. For more information, visit [www.mercyships.org.au](http://www.mercyships.org.au)

#### Notes to Editors

High resolution photos of Mercy Ships are available upon request, with attribution to Mercy Ships.

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