

Conakry Guinea aboard M/V Africa Mercy



2 April 2019

Greetings from Conakry Guinea, from aboard the MV Africa Mercy, the “world’s largest non-governmental floating hospital” where I am currently a volunteer hospital staff member, doing cataract and pterygia surgeries.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MV_Africa_Mercy is a link to some background about the hospital that floats.

This is my second time aboard, having spent February of 2018 in a training capacity. This time I am here on my own, with around ten cases a day on the schedule. The patients receive free care, and the only requirement for surgery is that they be bilaterally blind, with the goal of operating to give them back vision and independence.

Over 1000 Served

The eye care team is quite large, with an outlying clinic for continuing post op care, a screening team that goes to the far reaches of Guinea to identify the folks who would benefit, a hospital team of people getting the patients ready for surgery and recovering them, and a supply chain that goes all the way back to Texas (thanks again, Alcon, for your fabulous support!) Most of the team are spending about 9 months in Guinea, with the exception of the surgeons who come for two week stints. It is a privilege to be on the team.



Notice a certain “deer in the headlights” quality to my gaze? It’s because our team was just informed that the “One Thousandth Patient receiving cataract surgery” had just rolled in to the OR along with a camera crew. The above picture was the before...

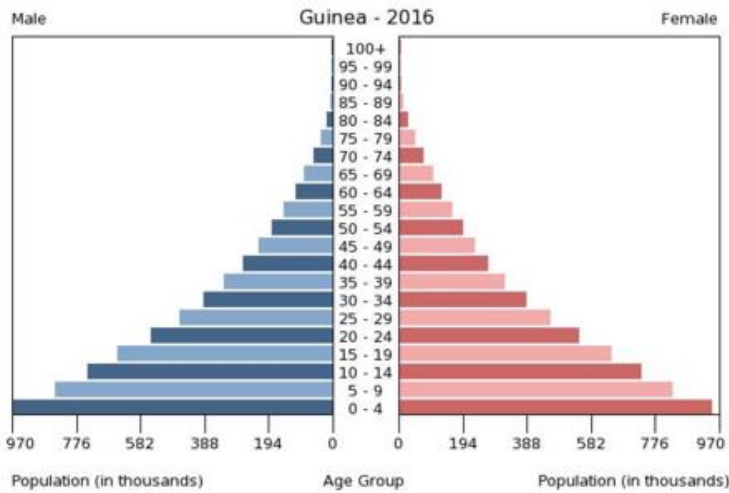


This is the during...



And this is the after... happily with a good outcome. A thousand chances to avoid the camera and lucky me. Thanks to good training, good equipment, and great help, the case went well. I hope that she enjoys her in

independence.



The above population pyramid shows how tough you have to be to make it to the age of 75 in Guinea. Compared to nearly two million children under the age of 4, there are only a few tens of thousands of septuagenarians.

Life aboard the Ship

I'm living large with a private cabin, it is much appreciated.



My cabin looks out onto the playground. Yes, that's right. Every afternoon the pediatric patients are brought up from the hospital ward for some fresh air. During the day, families bring their kids to play on the playground. There is a school from Kinder through High School. There is a day care. There are some really smart kids running around. One girl about 9 had her arm in a cast. I asked what happened – and started to get a tale that appears to have grown with the telling. It started with her telling me she fell overboard and it went on from there.

This year I am on the top deck and have a porthole that looks out



Laura, I looked and looked for one for Aedan, but am afraid this is a one-of-a-kind.



A cute kid at the Market getting entertained by one of our nurses buying fabric.



Food – Way More than 1000 served!



I'd like to finish the postcard home with a little about our food service and how important it is. More than once, I have been on a trip abroad, hoping to work, and getting laid low by a foodborne illness. Once, with the Navy, the entire contingent arrived in Cameroon 3 days before the food did and we had to eat "off the local economy". Most of us got sick, some needed IV's, and it really taught me that no matter how careful you are you can't be careful enough. So I REALLY value how important it is to be able to eat safely on a mission like this.

How to Stay Healthy

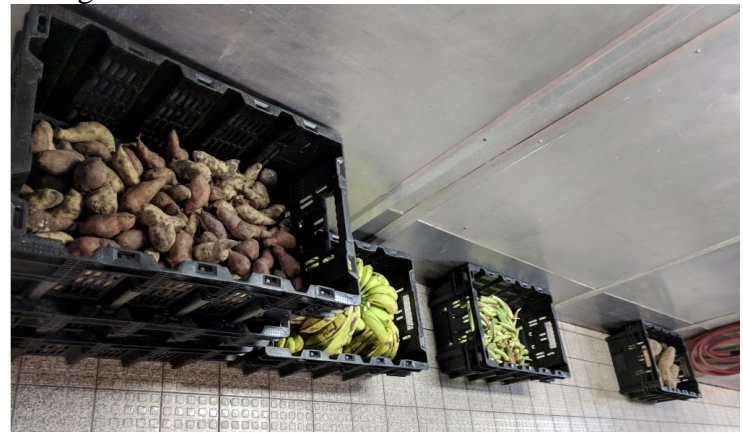
Doh! It starts with handwashing. On the dock. I was told that when the sinks went in dockside, and handwashing was mandated before coming aboard, there was an 80% decrease in gastroenteritis on board. There is gelled alcohol EVERYWHERE.

Food Glorious Food



I was able to get a tour of the galley this year. It is a tight fit. The galley was sized for a small cafeteria and restaurant on a ferry in Denmark. Now it puts out about 600 meals three times a day. Space for food storage is at

a premium. The menu is on a two month (8 week) rotation, and the ship is provisioned about three times during the field service.



Like all software, the fresh stuff has to be debugged.



Here the crew is washing the lettuce in bleach water and rinsing, after going through it looking for critters.



There is fresh bread every day, and they stay a day ahead in baking “just in case”. You can’t be without peanut butter and jelly even if the kitchen has some significant problem.



What’s life without some goodies?



Can’t have fried plantain without a fryer!



This is the answer to a mystery that has puzzled me for years. How do cooks make REALLY BIG pots of soup and handle them without burning themselves or spilling

the food? Here is what a commercial double walled mechanized boiler looks like. The pot has a double wall and very hot water (? Steam ?) surrounds the food in the double wall. When the cooking is done, you hit a switch and a little at a time, it mechanically tilts ... no spills involved.



The meats are all from Europe via container, and kept frozen till needed.

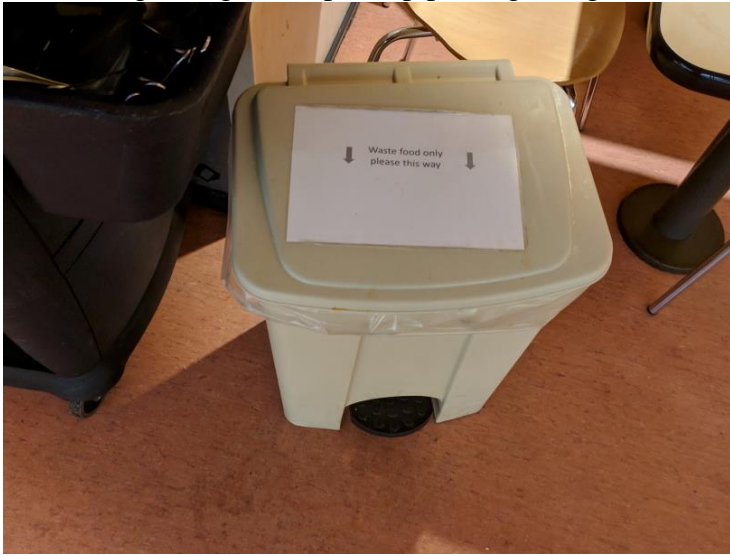


Lots of dry stores, lots of planning, and lots of making sure you don’t mess up because a lot of people are depending on you! Thanks to all who keep us fed.



I’d like to thank Tyrone Barton, Senior Chef Serge Nzembele, and Kathy Long for the tour.

Other things too good to pass up passing along:



Lids on the waste basket in the Galley – my suggestion last year was adopted!



Mandatory trip to the grocery store to learn about the country – still strong French influence.



Mommas are proud of their babies.



This one is for Pat!



A bulk material handler (grains) for Brother Tom.



A view of my Cabin for Sarah



Ice Cream Night on Thursday for EVERYONE!



Stick welding using Over-the-Counter sunglasses for eye protection... ouch! Hope he closes his eyes a lot.



A fan for Sarah!



Empty gutters on street cleaning day. Road swept, all trash removed.



Conakry food truck.



A pack of buddies for Mandy, Max, Maggie and Bonita!



The Cathedral Sainte Marie de Conakry



A tree worthy of Muir Woods!



Destination for Every Ophthalmologist!



Most unexpected finding in Cathedral... Cannon law or Canon law?



Landmark blinged out with LED striplights.



Local handcraft



Most creative wiring – for Todd



A bike ride for Joe with Julie and Keith



A really nice lunch out with Dr Therese and Saul.

Tomorrow is my last day in the OR. It has been a privilege to be trusted by the people of Guinea with their care. Our team has been doing between 8 and 10 cataracts a day and several additional cases such as secondary IOL placement and pterygia. A long term goal has been achieved thanks to some tremendous teachers – Haripriaya, Venkatesh, Glenn, and Pamela, thank you for mentoring me on the journey to where I am now able to contribute, and Sarah for your love.

Joe Miller MD MPH
jmillermdmph@gmail.com
jmiller@eyes.arizona.edu
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