



Dental Training, Guinea



Tsiky, Madagascar
Dental Surgery



Elijah, Ghana
Dental Surgery

Lives transformed through hope and healing...



Dental Screening



Dental Clinic



Instrument Sterilization



Dental Education Movie

Dental and Oral Diseases in Developing Countries

Many people in developing countries have little or no access to proper oral healthcare. In sub-Saharan Africa, dental care is often centralised in large, urban regions. In places where oral health services exist, the majority of the population face barriers to care including transportation, literacy, finances and poor oral health. Poor oral hygiene is a risk factor for diseases and can even lead to death.

Oral diseases

The most common oral diseases are dental cavities and periodontal (gum) disease, affecting all people regardless of socioeconomic status. In developing countries, changing living conditions due to urbanization and the adoption of western lifestyles, such as sugar-rich diets, are leading to a higher incidence of dental cavities. This situation is further exacerbated by limited access to dental care in low-resource settings. As a result, thousands of people suffer from dental pain for weeks or months.

Without proper and timely treatment, some oral infections can even be lethal. Poor oral health can contribute to other diseases such as noma or osteonecrosis (rotten decay) of the jaw. Without treatment, noma results in death in 70-90% of cases.

Those most affected by dental disease and lack of care are the most vulnerable groups: young children, elderly, and the poorest individuals. For children, tooth decay is a particular concern as it impacts childhood nutrition, growth and weight gain.

Statistics

- Oral diseases are the most common noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and affect people throughout their lifetime, causing pain, discomfort, disfigurement and even death. (Source: WHO)
- Severe periodontal (gum) disease, which may result in tooth loss, was estimated to be the 11th most prevalent disease globally. The main causes of periodontal disease are poor oral hygiene and tobacco use. (Source: Lancet 2017)
- Oral diseases affected half of the world's population (3.47 billion people) with dental caries (tooth decay) in permanent teeth being the most prevalent condition assessed. (Source: Lancet 2018)

Transformational Healthcare through Oral Care Programs

Bringing Hope and Healing

Mercy Ships aims to prevent and reduce the effects of a lack of oral healthcare by providing dental treatment and dental hygiene education and training. Mercy Ships uses hospital ships complemented by dental clinics to deliver free specialized healthcare to the world's forgotten poor.

Extractions & Procedures

Mercy Ships conducts free dental clinics, providing relief from infected or rotting teeth, performing extractions and inserting fillings.

Oral Hygiene Education

Poor oral hygiene and untreated tooth decay can lead to much more serious conditions such as noma. Mercy Ships dental teams work to improve oral health in developing countries through dental hygiene education and the training of local personnel.

Training & Capacity-Building

All day-crew, local men and women who serve as Mercy Ships crew members, learn skills and technical competencies, like dental assisting and instrument Sterilization, helping to increase the in-country knowledge base of oral healthcare. Where possible, Mercy Ships works alongside local dentists. In doing so, Mercy Ships facilitates an exchange of understanding and expertise between dentists of different cultures who are working within the same discipline.

Accomplishments

Since 1978, Mercy Ships has provided over 488,000 dental treatments/procedures to more than 187,000 patients.