

## Rwanda – a challenge and a gift of life

### *Report of a humanitarian mission in Kirinda*



Rwanda – a country that is still associated with the cruel genocide twenty years ago, in which approximately one million people were killed. This country, however, has changed rapidly in the last years: it is one of the few societies in Africa with the lowest corruption index and reclaims for itself an enormous economical growth. There is compulsory school attendance for all children over six years of age and the tuition is free of charge. Within a couple of years a revolutionary health care system was launched in which every citizen has to pay a fee of only 1,50 Euro and gets in return a primary health care. As a result 90 % of the Rwandan population has a health insurance.

Nevertheless a lot of problems remain: 12 million citizens of the densely populated country face 250 medical doctors - or in other words there are 0.2 doctors per 10 000 residents. In comparison in Germany 36 doctors are available per 10 000 inhabitants (\*World Health Statistics 2012).

#### ***The Mission in February 2014 at Kirinda Hospital***

From 2<sup>nd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> February four Operational Teams including 17 members stayed in four regional hospitals in Rwanda: Nyamata Hospital, Remera Rukoma Hospital, Kirinda Hospital and Gahini Hospital.

The Kirinda Hospital Team consisted of Dr. Maral Miller, Heike Herget and Joanna Bretschneider and Dr. Ralph Lorenz from Berlin and Dr. Karl Spitzer from Munich.

Twenty-six boxes full of medical supplies (over 0.5 tons) were transported without complications to Africa – a heartfelt thanks to *Brussel Airlines* which once again supported the booking and transaction generously and to Pastor Osee of ***Legacy of Hope*** for coordinating and organizing the mission. We also like to thank the ambassadress of Rwanda in Germany, Mrs. Christine Nkulyiyinka, for supporting our project!

After our first night in Kigali our team drove to Kirinda Hospital which took almost five hours due to damaged suspensions, missing cooling water and muddy streets.

On Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February, our work at Kirinda Hospital begun after an unexpected caesarian emergency was successfully operated.

The first evening after six hours concentrated performed surgery the first medical challenge appeared: a young man with acute belly pain was operated by the local surgeon Dr. Thomas. During the operation it became clear that the appendix of the patient was broken and his life was acutely threatened. Dr. Lorenz finished the decisive steps of the operation so that the young man could celebrate his new given life with his grateful mother.

During the five days of intense work together from 8 am to 8 pm we tried to operate as many patients as possible.

The sustainability of our mission was on one hand to operate hernia-patients, to leave medical instruments or consumption items, and on the other hand to give teachings to our local colleagues: Dr. Arthur, Dr. Xavier, Dr. Yves and Dr. Bernhard were truly interested to learn step by step about modern operation techniques. Also the local anesthetist team headed by Dr. Wencey and Grace were systematically trained by our anesthetist Dr. Maral Miller. The atmosphere during these operations was extraordinarily heartfelt and professional in this new mixed team of Rwandan and German Professionals.

The statistics resulted after almost five days 45 operations on 40 patients: this included 23 inguinal hernias (six hernias were operated on children). Furthermore 11 ventral hernias (epigastrical, umbilical hernias) and 10 hydroceles were operated.

All currently possible operation techniques with and without meshes were performed. The applied anasthetical techniques were mostly *Allgemeinnarkose mit Larynxmaske* and in some cases *Lokalanästhesie* or *Spinalanästhesie* was performed.

All the operations were luckily without complications even though due to low technical standard some operations were truly a challenge for us.

All of our operated patients were already released from hospital during our stay.

Looking back the most emotionally touching success was surely that the young man with the infected appendix could leave Kirinda Hospital on our departure day – we gratefully felt it as a gift of life.

Without the generous support of numerous donations by private persons and industrial organizations this mission would have never been possible. The great success resulted also in the capability of the German and Rwandan participants to join the teamwork that is vitally needed to succeed.

A Heartfelt Thanks to the local persons in charge, the nurses at Kirinda Hospital under the management of Dr. Thomas as medical director for the perfect preparation an organization on-site!

We are deeply thankful and are looking forward for a reunion in Rwanda!

*Ralph Lorenz for Team Kirinda, February 2014*