

THE NEWSPAPER

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Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



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Editorial

Let solidarity be our guide!

In today's complex, even unforgiving environment, solidarity remains essential. It contributes to a fairer world and guides every action we take. This solidarity also motivates Swiss and French healthcare professionals who, year after year, take part in humanitarian surgical missions, alleviating the suffering of children and young adults robbed of treatment by a harsh existence. These professionals meet patients, offer medical advice and operate, and they also take care to strengthen local capacities, with a view to guaranteeing access to quality care for all. By way of payment, smiles and wonderful life stories are reward enough, such as that of a patient scarred by the stigma of noma, who underwent repeated operations and became a nurse as passionate about her profession as she is dedicated.

An outpouring of generosity has led the Swiss Doctors' Orchestra to organise a concert on 8 June the proceeds of which shall go to children affected by the disease and treated in our programmes. This concert symbolises the synergy between art and medicine. It is a reminder of the many ways in which cooperation can bring comfort and hope. In the same vein, for once I'd like to share a personal reflection, inspired by a concert by an indignant artist. He sang: «Nobody lets go of anybody's hand». These words still resonate deeply with me. They perfectly illustrate the notion of support, participation and the essence of our commitment.

Finally, the long-awaited moment to welcome you to the heart of Renens, where we have taken up residence, has arrived. We look forward to meeting you at our Open Day, or at any other time. Your presence by our side and your support, at a time when there is ongoing tension in the various countries where we work, are as necessary as they are precious.



Marlyse Morard
Director



The CHUV had been generously hosting the offices of the Fondation Sentinelles on the Cery site (Prilly) for 25 years. Last summer, however, we learned that we would have to move and that we had until the end of March to find a new home. After more than six months of searching, we were finally able to move into our new offices in Renens in March.

To celebrate our move, we warmly invite you to an **open day on 3 May 2024, in Renens, rue du Bugnon 42, on the 6th floor**, above the Étoile garage. You'll be able to take a culinary tour of the various countries where we are present, and our programme managers will also be on hand to show you what we do. We look forward to seeing you there.

Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



A smiling future as

With a bequest, you continue your **com** children who have suffered and people



Noma finally recognised by the WHO

Following a long and arduous struggle led by the Nigerian Ministry of Health and other stakeholders in the field, noma has finally been included in the WHO's list of neglected tropical diseases. It joins rabies, leprosy and dengue fever on a list of 21 diseases that affect around 1 billion people in the poorest communities.

This recognition could draw the international community's attention to the existence of the disease, thereby increasing the funds allocated to treatment and research in this field.

Sentinelles has been fighting noma since the late 1980s. The first information session on noma took place during the World Health Assembly in 1989, following a plea to the WHO by the founder of Sentinelles, Edmond Kaiser. Sentinelles launched its programmes in Burkina Faso in 1990 and in Niger in 1992. Nearly 2,000 children suffering from this disease have benefited from awareness-raising pro-

jects, medical and social monitoring, treatment and surgery to repair the after-effects of noma and other facial pathologies.

Today, specific prevention measures and comprehensive care for children suffering from this disease are continuing in Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal. Last year, more than 400 noma survivors received personalised medical and social support through Sentinelles. Since 1990, just under 500 children who could not easily be operated on locally have been brought to Switzerland for major surgery. They are cared for by the HUG's reconstructive surgery department and stay at the Terre des hommes Valais centre in Massongex for postoperative care.



a legacy

commitment to
in great need.

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SENEGAL Surgical missions of hope

Humanitarian missions in Senegal enable us to offer reconstructive surgery to the most disadvantaged patients. They also contribute to the quality of training for the country's future surgeons and anaesthetists. Here's a look back at the history of these surgical missions, which are the fruit of a partnership between the team at the University of Dakar, the Plastic Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery Department of the University Hospitals of Geneva (HUG) and Sentinelles.

Three surgical missions have been organised in Senegal since March 2020.

The first mission was organised at Le Dantec Hospital in Dakar, in collaboration with Professor Anne-Aurore Sankale, head of the Plastic Surgery Department in Dakar, the first and only plastic surgery department in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa. The fact that these missions have been hosted by a specialised department has enabled them to achieve their full potential for providing

assistance. It has enabled us to provide care and support to a group of patients who would not otherwise have had access to treatment. Medical professionals have also had an opportunity to discuss ways of improving the quality of the care provided and broaden the scope of their activities. During the first mission, the team worked with patients suffering from the after-effects of severe burns with skin retractions that made surgery impossible without specialised anaesthetic techniques such as fibroscopic intubation. Thanks to the of the anaesthetists' expertise, it was possible to operate on these patients and perform various reconstruction techniques, using grafts and flaps.

The second mission introduced breast reconstruction techniques to patients who had undergone a mastectomy for breast cancer.

As for the third mission, patients suffering from sequelae of noma could be included, thanks to a new partnership with Dr Codou Badiane, from the oral and

dental division of the Senegalese Ministry of Health. Until then, patients who had been referred to the Ministry were either sent to Guinea-Bissau for treatment by the NGO Hilfsaktion, or transferred to the Mercy Ship (hospital ship).

It was therefore high time to set up a new network bringing together the Ministry's team, Sentinelles and the Dakar Plastic Surgery Department. This network offers new possibilities for local care, while at the same time enabling the local team or local surgeons to be taught the different approaches to reconstructive surgery for the after-effects of noma. Patients can also benefit from high-quality medical and social supervision thanks to Sentinelles.



Training programme

Since 2021, Professor Sankale has set up a training programme in plastic, reconstructive and aesthetic surgery, which has been validated and certified by the University of Dakar. Currently, 6 students are enrolled in the programme, including 3 students from other African countries. The introduction of this diploma is a strong incentive to help develop this speciality, which African patients have not had access to. It also enables Dakar to become a centre of expertise and training. The results speak for themselves and it is particularly interesting to follow the progress of the doctors in training. There are compelling reasons for increasing support to both the universities and the hospitals in the short and medium term. New agreements between the universities of Geneva and Dakar are currently being drawn up.

In terms of anaesthesia, surgical missions help to ensure the safety of surgical procedures and patient care in the post-operative period, by pain management right through to discharge from hospital. In addition, experience and expertise are made available to the local team. Doctors (managers and DES anaesthesia students) and anaesthesia technicians are highly motivated by the theoretical and practical teaching.

Loum has decided to become a nurse

Thanks to all these successful joint ventures, a reference centre for reconstructive surgery in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa could soon see the light of day. Many patients will benefit, like 30-year-old Loum, who was operated on during the last surgical mission. She was diagnosed with noma in 1996, when she was two years old. She was operated on by Professor Brigitte Pittet following her evacuation to Switzerland, which was organised by Sentinelles. On her return to Senegal, her progress was closely monitored. Several more operations have been carried out since, including one in Burkina Faso in 2015, directed by Prof. Pittet. Loum is a model of resilience and has developed a passion for the medical field. She now works as an emergency nurse at the Centre Hospitalier National d'Enfants Albert Royer, the hospital where she was admitted when the disease first appeared.

The origins of surgical missions

In 1994, the Association d'entraide des mutilés du visage (AEMV) organised its first surgical missions to treat the after-effects of noma and other facial pathologies, in collaboration with Sentinelles and the Department of Plastic,

Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery at Geneva University Hospitals. These missions initially took place in Niger until 2012, before being moved for security reasons to Burkina Faso between 2013 and 2018 then to Benin in 2019.



Finoana André after his surgery.



© Serge Rabarijaona

MADAGASCAR Resumption of surgical missions

Not everyone in Madagascar has access to healthcare. For almost 25 years, teams of surgeons from La Réunion have been consulting and operating on dozens of children free of charge. The Covid-19 pandemic brought these surgical missions to a halt. They resumed last December. 14 children were operated on, including Finoana André and Tojo, two 8-year-old boys.

More than 80% of Madagascar's population lives on less than CHF 2.- a day, with no health cover, according to Madagascar's National Statistics Institute and the World Bank. Only the more affluent workers in the formal sector, who earn an average monthly salary of around CHF 120.-, have such cover, but it is generally incomplete. They often have to advance exorbitant sums in the event of illness. At present, admission to hospital costs between CHF 90.- and 140.- per day, and a scan costs around CHF 140.-. Under these conditions, not everyone can afford even basic

care, and specialised care is a luxury reserved for a privileged few.

No early detection

Some of the many families referred to Sentinelles by various medical and social workers have begun treatment but have often had to abandon it because they cannot afford it. Sometimes they even sell their possessions, if they have any, or get into debt without ever knowing if they will be able to complete the treatment. The majority of children treated by our programme suffer from orthopaedic and traumatic conditions, mainly congenital malformations and the after-effects of accidents. Certain malformations may seem to have a higher prevalence in Madagascar than in rich countries. This is essentially due to the social and financial constraints that prevent children from having access to early diagnosis and treatment. If these pathologies could be detected before birth and treated from an early age, there would be fewer serious and complex cases requiring surgery.

Surgical missions

For nearly 25 years, we have been fortunate to be able to rely on teams of surgeons

from La Réunion. Several times a year, they undertake week-long surgical missions in paediatric orthopaedics and traumatology. During these visits, they consult, operate and refer dozens of children free of charge. The aim of these missions, in which doctors and other medical professionals take part, is also to exchange experience.

During the last mission, which lasted a week, Sentinelles brought 33 children for consultation on the first day, 14 of whom were operated on in the following days at the former Antananarivo military hospital (HoMi). Of the others, 9 were referred to different medical services and the remaining 10 will be re-examined during the next mission, scheduled for six months' time.

The number of cases of clubfoot, which accounted for the majority of operations in previous missions, has fallen sharply. However, the surgeons have had to intervene in some fairly complex situations, such as congenital dislocation of the hip.

Successful operations

Two 8-year-old boys, Finoana André and Tojo, benefited from these operations during the latest surgical mission.



© Serge Rabarjaona



Tojo prior to the operation.

Finoana André had a malformation in one of his legs. This disability was detected when he started walking. He also complained of pain when he had to walk for long periods. At the age of 3, his mother took him to a traditional masseur, who treated him for a month without any improvement. She then went to the basic health centre in her village. The doctor then sent the child to the town hospital for better treatment. Unfortunately, her income as an embroiderer and her husband's income as a day labourer were not enough to afford the treatment offered to Finoana André. It was not until October 2023 that he was referred to Sentinelles. Doctors from the surgical team on La Réunion diagnosed a rachitic deformity with genu valgum (X-shaped legs) and operated on him during the week. The operation, called osteoclasia of the femur, involved fracturing a bone to straighten the deformity. He will have to wear a cast for 6 weeks and undergo rehabilitation sessions with our physiotherapist. Finoana André will be re-examined on the next mission.

Tojo suffered from megadactyly, i.e. excessive growth of his index finger, which was becoming a real handicap both physically and socially. The sur-

geons on La Réunion had already seen him before the pandemic, but the operation had to be postponed due to a lack of suitable equipment. During the last mission, he underwent surgery that included a finger amputation on one of his hands and a pin insertion. Tojo is gradually recovering from the operation and can now look forward to a brighter future.

The origins of surgical missions

Dr Alain Aliamus, a French surgeon based on La Réunion, began working with Sentinelles in 2001. Surgical missions traditionally take place at the HoMi, also known as the Soavinandriana Hospital. Over the years, he has been accompanied by a number of fellow surgeons, including Dr Jean-Christophe Ruzic, to whom he has now handed over the reins. After an interruption following the Covid-19 pandemic, the missions were finally able to resume last December under the direction of Dr Ruzic, who was accompanied by Dr Laurent Daumas, both surgeons at the CHU de La Réunion in Saint-Pierre.

To find out more about the history of these surgical missions, scan this QR code.





© Orchestre des médecins suisses

Switzerland Concert in support of Sentinelles

The Swiss Doctors' Orchestra is organizing a classical music concert in aid of the association Les amis de Sentinelles, on 8 June 2024, at 6.30 p.m. in Geneva's Victoria Hall. We hope you will attend this exceptional musical event.

The Swiss Doctors' Orchestra is a not-for-profit association founded in 2019. It is made up of doctors from all over the country. Over three weekends, 60 to 80 musicians will come together for a symphonic concert project led by an inspiring conductor and exceptional soloists, which will reach musical heights. The orchestra's aim is to transmit the universal language of music, create links and bring together an audience from different generations, while making a financial contribution to a humanitarian organisation to which all the profits from the concert will be donated. This year, the orchestra has decided to support Les amis de Sentinelles.

An idea born in Chile

The committee and some members of the orchestra have taken part in a number of groups, including the European Doctors Orchestra, the Orchestre Symphonique des Médecins de France and the World Doctors Orchestra (WDO). The idea of founding a doctors' orchestra in Switzerland was born one summer evening during a WDO concert tour of Chile.

These very rich and intense encounters between musicians-doctors provide an opportunity to perform orchestral pieces by the great masters, or discover previously little-known works.

The Orchestre des Médecins Suisses (SMOMS) will be performing at Geneva's Victoria Hall on 8 June 2024, with a programme including Haydn's Cello Concerto N°1 in C major and Mendelssohn's Symphony N° 3 in A minor, Op. 56, «Scottish», conducted by Anthony Fournier, with soloist Christoph Croisé, violinist George-Cosmin Banica and violist Jenny Askerov Joelson.

You can book your ticket online at the Geneva ticket office: <https://billetterie-culture.geneve.ch/list/events> or make a donation to support this concert by scanning the QR code.



Website of the Swiss Doctors' Orchestra: <https://www.smoms.ch>

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