

Cameroon Mission Report October 7-22, 2022 in Galagala, Ngaoundal, Hôpital de District Sainte Jeanne-Antide Thouret de Galagala



Participants: Eveline Fuchs (organization, surgical technology specialist) and Romy Büsser (Report, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner)

Aim of the operation

- Teaching Endoscopy Techniques (omitted from the beginning because Patricia Herzig cannot come to Cameroon with us)
- Development of standards Cleaning and maintenance of endoscopes
- Overview of what would be useful in terms of support in the surgical area in the future
- Support in the care of newborns, teaching new knowledge and implementing it according to the possibilities on site

October 7

The Cameroon adventure starts today.

Eveline and I meet already the evening before departure at the Hotel Ibis Budget in Kloten. Johannes and Patricia fell ill with Covid shortly before departure and therefore did not participate in the mission and our already small team shrunk from four to two participants.

October 8

We wake up early and take the streetcar for two stops. Via Brussels we fly with Brussels Airline to Yaoundé. The flight is pleasant. We were a bit irritated that nobody wanted to see the PCR test, although according to the information of the airline it had to be done. We are greeted and accompanied by an airport employee already before the passport control.

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Before entering the country, however, we have to undergo another rapid covid test. Fortunately, it is negative and we are called to go to passport control. After this we go to the baggage carousel, unfortunately only one of the two suitcases made it to Cameroon with us. That is why we still have to report this. We are warmly welcomed by Sœur Ann-Cecile and the chauffeur. And now, finally, we can go. We think! To celebrate the day we still have a flat tire ..., the chauffeur also masters this hurdle and now it's in the dark and with tarnished windshield, bad wipers to the accommodation. Fortunately accident-free. We get another small snack and then fall tired into bed. As we learn the next day, the chauffeur was still attacked on the way home and slightly injured by a knife!

October 9

We slept well with the sisters in Yaoundé. Small fine breakfast and we start into the day. Arrival is the motto today. Accompanied by Sœur Stephanie, we buy a SIM card, 3GB/day for 15 days, cost 18'500 CFA =27 CHF. In the evening we are taken to the train station, the train leaves punctually at 19:50. We have our seats in a four-person couchette compartment. All seats are occupied, although Patricia's seat should not have been occupied, because the tickets could not be canceled.

October 10



During the 13-hour train ride we could sleep well and a lot and arrive on time in Ngaoundal. Because no one is there to pick us up yet, we have to wait a few minutes. Apparently they did not expect us so early and on time.

After our arrival we have a short time to strengthen ourselves with a breakfast and to refresh ourselves. Then we are immediately taken to the hospital, because they have been waiting for us with the operations. We are introduced to different team members and then we are taken to the children/patients who want to be operated by our mission.

At 11:55 a.m. the incision was made for the first hernia operation. Eveline is immediately placed in the operating room (OR), Romy in the recovery room (AWR).

Also this afternoon thunderstorms and heavy rain for a short time.

A total of eight children were operated on today by Dr. Lamère and Dr. Chime. They range in age from 1-13 years. Dr. Chime was organized especially for the campaign, since Patricia is out. We arrive late at home, only at half past seven. We are warmly welcomed with a fine

Znacht. At the end of dinner we have a fine lemon tea and then Eveline and I need another schnapps after this brilliant start.

Somehow we were both frustrated today, especially before the Znacht. In addition, there was the fatigue of the journey.

Something with the communication seems to have gone quite wrong. They only called in children for the operations - 42 - they say. We are curious. There seem to be exhausting days ahead.

At night it is unexpectedly cool, we even needed wool blankets.

October 11

Early day wake up, but after a good night of restful sleep is not so bad.

In the hospital, the eight patients operated on yesterday are visited first. Some of them are already allowed to go home, the others are transferred to the pediatric ward. Overall, they are doing well, some are still in a little pain and do not yet have much appetite.

At around 9 a.m., we will start operating in both rooms today.

In total we operated on ten children today, one was not operated on because he had a cough.

What was funny, or rather interesting, was that a nurse who has never been in the operating room is put there to instrument and assist the surgeon. He has no idea how to dress sterilely, how to move around in the OR. Sœur Cecile skillfully gets out of the affair ... Eveline must therefore also take over this task, in addition to assisting in both rooms.



Today we have fortunately earlier closing time, we come back in time for dinner.

Today I put my foot in my mouth. Patients are pushed upside down on the couch here. At home, we always push the lying patients footward. But here that would mean that the patient is dead. I hope I don't forget again until the next time!

October 12

After a fresh night's sleep - luckily we have the wool blankets - we start our third day of surgery.

When we arrive at the hospital, we visit the children who were operated on yesterday and the patients who were still hospitalized the day before yesterday.

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We experience the great gratitude of the parents that their children could be operated on free of charge. Some of the little patients are still in pain and may not yet drink and eat properly.



Today, a total of ten children are operated on. Two of them have to be revised, one of them because of a hematoma.

We leave the hospital after 6 p.m., after the last two patients are also transferred from AWR to the department.

The surgeon, Dr. Lamère, complains of chills. Let's see if he will be fit again tomorrow. He was taken home by us. Sœur Cécile offers the "grand morceau" - those were her words about him when he was not yet sitting with us in the car - to drive home with us.

We are tired and a little frustrated. Today we were suddenly told that hernia operations will also be performed next week. We actually wanted to be there for the newborns and the endoscopy. Tomorrow morning we want to clarify this.

For dinner we are spoiled with fresh fine fish. We go to sleep earlier today to recover.



October 13

We start the day the same early as yesterday.

Dr. Lamère still has a fever, he suspects it is malaria. But he wants to work today after all.

First, on morning rounds, we check in on the children who had surgery yesterday and those who are still inpatients.

Among them are two children who have a fever and are not yet eating properly.

Then we go to the operating wing and actually assume that the operations will start immediately, since ten children are also on the operating schedule today.

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But the team first sits down in the break room and first eats a hearty breakfast. They eat almost all the toast, which is actually intended for lunch. I secure a piece of bread for us, hide it, otherwise we have nothing to eat. Otherwise there is only some toast, bananas and tea for lunch. If dinner is not served until 7 p.m., that is a long time when we are on our feet all day.



Thus, the first operation starts today just before 10 am.

After all, we operated on eight children again today, but for once we finished work a little earlier.

First we take the time for a short tour on the hospital grounds, then we drive home with the sisters, but get off a little earlier and walk through the village. So we still have some movement and see something of the local village life.

In the evening there was again a fine meal cooked by the sisters and the obligatory lemon tea for the night.

Eveline and I take a little schnapps like every evening before going to bed, our other "medicine" besides the malaria medicine.

Fortunately, our second suitcase finally arrived intact in Ngaoundal today! With joy we unpacked all the hearty children's clothes and blankets we had brought, the oxygen goggles for the newborns, stomach tubes, hand disinfectant and material that Eveline needs for cleaning the endoscopes.

October 14

Today starts with cloudy skies and a short downpour. Yesterday it had only drizzled a little in the evening.



In the hospital, it's time for morning rounds. Most of the children are doing well under the circumstances, and many are quickly sent home. Three small children are still a little worried because they have a fever or are vomiting and are not eating properly after the operation. Today there are only four operations, it says in the morning.

We will start again after 9 o'clock. The four hernia operations will remain today.

A total of 38 children were thus operated on in the first week, two of whom underwent revision.

So after noon we have already finished work.

We go over to the endoscopy department, where we first check the two endoscopes for leaks. It appears that the devices, which come from Shanghai, are in good condition. The endoscopy tower is a bit dirty and dusty. We can't turn it on yet because of insufficient power, but it might work. The room conditions for performing an endoscopy would still need to be optimized, as well as the cleaning area. But Eveline will do that on Monday.

Now it's the weekend!

Our chauffeuse Bernadette still has some work to do in the office, which is fine with us, because this way we make our way home on foot and enjoy the surroundings. From time to time the children call us "nasara", which means "the white ones".

In the evening we have homemade pizza with the raclette cheese we brought. Mega fine.

We were quite hungry again, since we have not eaten anything real all day. After we have helped like every evening still with the washing up / drying, we enjoy our closing time and go soon in our beds.



October 15

Today's rest day we spent at the market and in the kitchen baking cakes.

It was a big challenge with the oven. The first cake took three hours to finally bake because the gas flame kept going out. The apple crumble cakes went down very well and were eaten quickly.

The third cake, a variation of Sven Epiney's Schoggikuchen, instead of chocolate we took the edition of Nutella available here, we baked on the stove. We were a little critical, but purely visually it looked pretty fine.

It's Sœur Lucia's birthday on Sunday, and we hope that they will enjoy the chocolate cake as much as the crumble cake.

Romy was still otherwise busy today, she had Rastazöpfli made again.

They had to sit still for hours. Beauty must also suffer in Africa.

In the evening it thunders quite strongly, certainly for an hour.

October 16

Today, for once, we can sleep a little longer.

We have a leisurely breakfast and go to the service at 9 am. The service lasts two and a half hours! Unusual for us, but if the sermon is not very long, the songs and the many beautiful colored dresses of the women and girls make it nevertheless entertaining.

At noon, as yesterday, there is a fine meal, then for dessert our chocolate cake with a fine Bialetti coffee. Eveline and I thought the cake was really good, but the sisters didn't like it as much as the apple crumble cake. Or maybe they ate too much cake yesterday?

In the afternoon it is time to rest and do nothing.



It is currently still rainy season here, so it has a lot of mosquitoes, by which we are almost eaten outside. It has mosquito nets in the windows, but obviously they are not quite tight. Unfortunately there are none above the beds, actually we should have insisted on it ... for the last nights we don't need to apply for one either. But this is surely important for a next mission, and maybe we can plan the mission in the months outside the rainy season. (Before our departure, the mosquito net will be cleared up, it was simply forgotten after the last room cleaning).

October 17

We start the new week early again.

First, the entire staff meets in the conference room. First we pray together, then the report of the individual disciplines from the weekend, how many admissions, discharges, deaths, etc. there were, the presentation of individual patients. Most of the time it is said: "il/elle va

mieux ce matin". Let's hope that it really is ... Even how many laboratory analyses were done is mentioned.

Unfortunately, there was a death on the pediatric floor. A seven-day-old twin child died yesterday. It bled from the navel, probably was not properly abducted during home birth. The newborn was still receiving blood transfusions, but unfortunately could not be saved. During the report, some critical questions are asked and discussed together.

Then the workday starts for everyone at the respective stations.

In the operating wing, four hernia operations are scheduled today without us.

We will spend the last three days taking care of our other tasks, which we actually came here to do.

Eveline looks at the endoscope with Sœur Agatha. Where to endoscope in the future is today's target, and she instructs her in cleaning, disinfection and reprocessing of the endoscopes, which is very time-consuming, but also important. Sœur Agatha is very interested and motivated.

Romy is supposed to take care of the newborns.

However, there are only eleven children on the pediatric/maternity unit. Three of them are newborns, the others are aged from two months to 8 years.

During morning rounds, I get an initial overview of the clinical pictures. I take the ward's problem child, a malnourished 8-year-old boy, for an abdominal ultrasound. There I see that he has parasites. A bad combination, to his malnutrition, but the explanation for his diarrhea. Back on the ward, the boy gets oxygen, he is extremely tachypneic, and his oxygen saturation is only 80%. He appears very distressed. The grandmother does not want us to give him oxygen at first.

For adequate therapy, i.e. antibiotics, he receives an infusion and a stomach tube. I place the gastric tube. Since the stomach is very distended and perhaps also out of habit from my daily IPS routine in Switzerland, I aspirate the stomach contents. Even the local nurses are amazed at what I can pull out.

Apparently they still had the boy treated traditionally by the medicine man and he seems to have given him some nasty brown broth to drink.

After emptying the stomach, the abdomen is now much less distended and soft, the boy falls asleep exhausted.

I hope that the therapy will help him now and that it is not too late for him. He does not have any physical reserves of his own.

After this interesting insight into pediatrics, I meet Eveline again. She is also satisfied and confident after the teaching day.

A nice story happened today at noon: a mother holds the phone to my ear, the uncle of the child we operated on last week still wants to thank us personally.

Yesterday we already received a thank you from Sœur Lucie from a dad via SMS:

"Message des remerciements à tous se qui ont construit set Hopital et à tous se qui ont mi la main pour aide.

Vraiment merci infiniment à vous et à tout vos collaborateurs ont ne sais pas comment vous remercie avec tout ce que vous avez fait pour nous en traitant nos enfants et en leurs sauvent la vie, nous prions à Dieu le tout puissant vous comble du bonheur la santé et longevité et une vie paisible vous donne tout ce que vous desirez et vous donne le paradis Amin. "



October 18

We start early again into our second last day here in Ngaoundal.

First we visit the hernia children who were operated on yesterday. Then we go on rounds in the pediatrics department. There are two new patients. Our problem child with parasites unfortunately passed away last night. The gut feeling was not wrong that he came to the hospital too late - probably often a daily routine here.

Today, only one hernia operation on a child is scheduled in the operating room, because a cesarean section is scheduled first.

Before noon, Sœur Claudine informs us that she forgot to tell us that we should have registered at the Residents' Office upon arrival, and that we must leave immediately, as the office is only open until noon.

Well, Eveline was actually in the operating room and wanted to watch the gynecologist perform an interesting procedure. So we went first "home" to get our passports and then to the "Commissaire", the police inspector of Ngaoundal.

Actually, it was only about him seeing us, he already had the copies of our passports. But if something should happen, he would have to inform the embassy. After about half an hour of small talk, that was it. We declined the invitation for a city tour and went back to the hospital.

Eveline and Sœur Agatha are busy, the cleaning and disinfection of the endoscopes are looked at and practiced in theory and then also several times in practice.

Unfortunately, they are trying in vain to turn on the endoscopy tower with the IT specialist Suleyman, then tomorrow the electrician will still come by.

Romy makes a visit to the maternity ward, at the moment there are only two newborns. In general, there seems to be little going on, even in the delivery room or on the grounds we hardly see pregnant women who come to the hospital to give birth.

Outside the ultrasound room, after all, there are a few pregnant women sitting for their preliminary examination, and in the pediatrics department they always have sick newborns and infants who are only a few days old.

At home we bake the sisters another apple crumble cake as a farewell.



October 19

Our last day of work at the hospital.

Hernia operations are two today. Thus, in the eight days total 44 children with inguinal or umbilical hernias were operated, including three children twice (revised).

First, there's an information session for everyone today, a kind of firefighting course.

Sœur Marie-Grace interrupts and admonishes the nurses that at least someone must remain on the unit during the event, especially if - as in pediatrics - a child has oxygen.

One of the pediatric nurses stands up and follows her instructions, because in the wards the patients were all alone.

After further training, I go along on the pediatric rounds, Eveline gets back to work in the endoscopy with Sœur Agatha. Unfortunately, the electrician can't help with the missing picture either, apparently a cable is defective and one is not available on site. But how this is now procured, we do not know.

At noon we leave a bit earlier than planned and at short notice. Sœur Agatha is not well, she is sick and has to go home. Since we are so far finished with the work, we accompany her to a dispensary, a practice in the village, which is also supported by the sisterhood, to take blood.

We do some office work in the afternoon and write the mission report.

In the evening we enjoy a last meal and get-together with the sisters. We are abundantly presented with nuts, headbands and small bags.

At 22:15 we are driven to the train station by Sœur Bernadette and Claudine. In the meantime, it is pitch dark and not quite safe to drive without street lighting due to the many potholes in the road.

Our train arrives on time in Ngaoundal and so we only have to wait a short time and then we can already lie down tired in our couchette and sleep.



October 20

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After a twelve-hour train ride, we arrive in Yaoundé and are already expected. The ride through the city back to our accommodation with the sisters takes half an hour and we are immediately spoiled with a fine lunch including coffee and can strengthen ourselves.

In the afternoon, rest and paperwork are the order of the day.

In the evening a fine dinner and then it's early bedtime today. Although we have not done much today, we are tired, Eveline is even a bit sickly.

October 21

The nine hours of sleep have done very well. A little after and before sleep for tonight, where the flight home is pending.

We have breakfast and then go for a short city tour with Sœur Stephanie and the chauffeur.

We visit a small market to buy souvenirs, but the vendors are so pushy that it is not a pleasant shopping experience.

Back we have lunch again: fresh fish and fried plantains, very nice.

We rest a bit before heading to the airport later in the afternoon for our last leg of the return trip.

October 22

We land at 5 a.m. in Brussels, are tired, couldn't sleep much on the plane. Apparently no one is prepared for our flight, the passport controls are not yet manned. There is a long queue of people, no information is given, when we ask, we are told that there are no customs officers... Conditions as we would expect them in Africa.

So we wait almost an hour until we get through passport control. Fortunately, unlike many other travelers, we have enough time until our onward flight. Then, after two weeks, we finally have a fine latte and a croissant again.

The onward flight to Zurich is fortunately only short and we are glad to have arrived home in good health.



