Dr. Sr. Mary Margaret Ajiko

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Dr. Sr. Mary Margaret Ajiko was born in Soroti, a rural area of Northeast Uganda, as one of the seven daughters. Her father was a respected agricultural officer who counter-culturally valued the education of girls. He encouraged Dr. Ajiko to attend Soroti Primary school, where she emerged as the best student. This enabled her to obtain a scholarship to Sacred Heart Girls Secondary School, where she became a nun after admiring the sisters' commitment to teaching and care for the sick. Her father was initially concerned that becoming a nun would interfere with her education, but she saw this role as complementary to her medical career.

Dr. Ajiko attended Makerere University School of Medicine, and then while working at Kitovu Hospital in Masaka, she was mentored by a committed surgeon and Irish nun named Maura Lynch. Dr. Lynch taught surgery with passion and inspired Dr. Ajiko to complete her surgical training at Makerere University. Following her surgical training, she was posted again at Kitovu Hospital, where she taught medical students and perfected her skills under the mentorship of Dr. Lynch. Work at the district hospital was demanding; there was limited diagnostic equipment and Ugandan doctors are poorly paid. With extreme poverty and cultural superstitions, many patients present with severe disease. Dr. Ajiko's skills were put to the test, dealing with obstetric fistulas, uterine ruptures, gangrenous organs, typhoid intestinal perforations, and surgical sequelae of uncontrolled diabetes.

She was further challenged when she transferred to her hometown of Soroti, serving a region of two million people. She was faced with patients requiring skills from orthopedics, neurosurgery, plastics, pediatric surgery, urology, otolaryngology, and sometimes dentistry. There were often inadequate facilities, such as no running water for surgical scrub, inconsistent electricity, limited operating instruments and medical supplies, no blood bank, absence of diagnostic imaging, and too few beds. She has performed many surgeries under the light from a mobile phone.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Ajiko finds great joy and meaning in her work. She has engaged with many international partners and teaches students from Uganda, Sweden, University of British Columbia, Yale University, and University of California. She has become an Adjunct Professor at the University of British Columbia and conducts Global Surgery teaching sessions over internet conferencing platforms. She is actively engaged in research

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resulting in numerous publications and presentations at international conferences.

She became particularly interested in the care of children after observing the enormous disease burden and care delivery challenges. She has organized pediatric surgical camps to respond to the need, but after recognizing that this is a global problem, she has dedicated herself to making a greater impact. President Museveni of Uganda has recognized her contributions to surgery and has honored her with a scholarship to pursue a PhD at Karolinska Institute. She intends to describe the burden of pediatric surgical disease and health seeking behavior of families, with the aim of informing policy makers to improve surgical access.

Dr. Ajiko summarizes her career with these words: “I joined Global Health so as to speak out– be the voice of the

voiceless and make a difference to the lives of many children in the globe; especially Uganda. You can offer the best surgery wherever you are! My fulfillment is witnessing the quality of life added to these babies through surgery. When you are faced with a problem, don’t quit or run away. There is always a solution to a problem and when it is shared it becomes light. In difficult times I asked my colleagues how they had managed, they answered ‘patience!’ Above all my faith as a nun has helped me serve my patients holistically, moves me to serve with love.”

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