Society of Critical Care Medicine
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SCCM Africa Infrastructure Relief and Support Project Will Improve Access to Lifesaving Oxygen in West Africa

Direct Relief grant will support program launching in The Gambia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone

- The Society of Critical Care Medicine's (SCCM) Africa Infrastructure Relief and Support (AIRS) project will help bring lifesaving oxygen to hospitals in The Gambia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.
- Oxygen is an essential medication used in the treatment of COVID-19, pneumonia, surgery, trauma, pregnancy, and many other conditions.
- The SCCM AIRS project received a $5.5 million grant from Direct Relief.

SAN FRANCISCO – In an effort to ensure the availability of medical oxygen to patients in West Africa, SCCM is launching the Africa Infrastructure Relief and Support (AIRS) project, made possible by a $5.5 million grant from Direct Relief.

Under SCCM's global health initiative, AIRS—in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins Global Alliance of Perioperative Professionals (GAPP) and the Institute of Global Perioperative Care—officials in The Gambia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone will identify specific medical oxygen-related needs, including hospital-based infrastructure, oxygen-generating plants, and solar energy. SCCM plans to eventually expand the initiative to additional countries.

The World Health Organization notes that oxygen is a lifesaving essential medication with no substitute. It is used to treat respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19 and pneumonia, in surgery and trauma, and often is needed for vulnerable patients, including elderly patients, pregnant patients, and newborns. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the severe lack of access to medical oxygen in various parts of the world, including several countries in West Africa.

"The Gambia, for instance, had no medical oxygen at all until last year and was relying on industrial oxygen, which is not suited for patient care," said John B. Sampson, MD, chair of the SCCM AIRS project and an associate professor of anesthesiology and critical care medicine at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore. "In most hospitals, healthcare professionals take it for granted that they can turn a knob or push a button and provide patients with oxygen, whether through a face mask, cannula, or ventilator."

Officials and healthcare professionals from the three countries have informed project staff about their oxygen needs and are working closely with SCCM AIRS leaders. The project will involve the development of oxygen-generating plants, installation and maintenance of solar panels to

ensure an ongoing power supply to the equipment, installation of oxygen piping within facility walls, and in-depth training for workers who will operate solar and oxygen-generating systems to ensure the sustainable provision of benefits for years to come. The projects will vary based on each country's specific needs:

- The Gambia: Only one hospital in the country has medical oxygen, so the government and medical community have requested development of an oxygen-generating facility at another hospital.
- Liberia: Because the country has ongoing oxygen access issues, officials are requesting development of an oxygen-generating facility for a rural hospital. Because of an unstable power grid, the project will develop a solar-based renewable energy system to power the oxygen-generating supply.
- Sierra Leone: Because the country has existing plans to create an oxygen-generating facility, officials have requested the development of renewable solar energy.

SCCM will offer complimentary memberships as well as Fundamental Critical Care Support (FCCS) training for critical care professionals in the three countries once the oxygen and solar infrastructure are developed.

"The SCCM AIRS project is unique and exactly the type of program that is needed in areas throughout Africa and the world to fund in Africa," said Thomas Tighe, president and chief executive officer of Direct Relief. "It's uniquely positioned to centralize resources and talent to meet these needs, and it's a privilege to support this vital work."

Direct Relief's investment in the AIRS project represents its single largest investment in oxygen availability to date, building on its efforts in recent years to equip healthcare professionals across 65 countries with oxygen generation plants, ventilators, and oxygen concentrators.

Information about the SCCM AIRS project will be presented during SCCM's 2023 Critical Care Congress. The media is invited to a special educational reception, SCCM Global Health: Advancing Equity in Global Health Through Technology and Innovation in Critical Care, Saturday, January 21, 2023, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Pacific Time in the Continental Ballroom 5 at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square Hotel.

THE SOCIETY OF CRITICAL CARE MEDICINE

The Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) is the largest nonprofit medical organization dedicated to promoting excellence and consistency in the practice of critical care. With members in more than 100 countries, SCCM is the only organization that represents all professional components of the critical care team. SCCM's Critical Care Congress brings together intensivists and critical care experts from around the world to share the latest scientific research, develop solutions to common issues, and improve the care of critically ill and injured patients. Visit sccm.org for more information. Follow @SCCM or visit SCCM on Facebook.

DIRECT RELIEF

About Direct Relief: *A humanitarian organization committed to improving the health and lives of people affected by poverty or emergencies, Direct Relief delivers lifesaving medical resources throughout the world to communities in need—without regard to politics, religion, or ability to pay. For more information, please visit https://www.DirectRelief.org.*

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