

## Inauguration of the new Medical Centre in Man



«During these years I think I alone visited 50,000 patients,» says Dr. A. Carlo Montaguti, a focolarino doctor and Director of the Social Medical Centre of the little Focolare town in Man, Ivory Coast. «I was a doctor in my country, Italy, but my practice was not so intense. Those who preceded me when there was still the war, told me before my departure: Carlo, if you don't treat them, no one else will.»

**The patients arrived also in the night.** The health records were compiled in the *apatam* (shed) in front of the hospital, and then they entered for the medical checkup by any of the three doctors of the centre, one of which is Muslim. The doctors prescribed the lab tests and got the results in about two hours. In a second visit, the diagnosis was done and the treatment prescribed. In the span of a morning one manages to get everything done. «It is not usual to have a lab for analysis in such a small centre in the suburbs,» Carlo continues; «I worked for four years without a lab and it was really difficult.» Luc Dro, head of the laboratory, explained that being in a tropical zone, there is great need for studies on parasites that cause malaria and other endemic diseases, but the lab is able to perform a complete check-up. The centre also has a small pharmacy, where over a 100,000 consultations were registered.

«**We do all that is possible to put the patients at the core of our work** - says Dr. Alavo Bazini – and this explains the great influx. It does not suffice to say “the medicines are free of charge,” if the people are not satisfied. This is where the centre's originality lies.» When possible, there is also a cultural mediator who translates into the local tongues.

«**We also have the internet and wi-fi connection** - explained Dr. Eliassa Sow – In this way we can do research work and cooperate with other doctors from afar.» Dr. Montaguti continues «I came in 2004 – when the centre consisted of two tiny rooms for visits and one for medications. The people have appreciated our work especially because during the war in 2002, in the most difficult moments when all the foreigners were leaving the country, we decided to stay on, and risk our lives. They understood that we were there for them and this generated their trust. At

times it came about that on a Monday, after the weekend break, the patients said: "Doctor, I tried to endure in order to come to you." If their situation was not too serious, they preferred to wait another day and suffer a bit more, to be able to come here!»

**One of the strong points of the centre is also the healthcare team** which is involved in the entire care process. When the political-military crisis ended and the situation in the region calmed down, the term of the centre was extended and in 2008 we moved into a new facility. «It seemed like a dream – Carlo recalls – but after two years with the influx of patients – more than 80 a day plus their relatives - quite a crowd! – the old structure could not take any more. And we continued to dream.»

**And so last 10 October, the new Focolare Social Medical Centre, opened last 7 September, was inaugurated** in Man, a stone's throw from Mariapolis Victoria. It is a modern architecture for a facility of over 1,000 sq. m, with the addition of new services: 15 beds, a dentist's studio, a physiotherapy room, and new diagnostics equipment (ultrasound scans, hemoglobin electrophoresis and microbiology). In the last days the nutrition centre, previously located in the district of Libreville, was completed and transferred to cure infantile malnutrition..

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Video presentation of the Medical Centre (in French)