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LEGENDS IN UROLOGY

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I feel greatly honored to be invited to contribute to the Legend series. It has been an eye-opening experience to reflect on the milestones that mark both my personal and professional journey.

I was born in Thiès, Senegal, where I spent my childhood. I was blessed with loving parents that emphasized hard work and perseverance as the keys to success; and later on, a wonderful wife and children that provided encouragement and grounding. Losing my father at a young age had a profound impact on the trajectory of my life. The suddenness of his departure left me with many unanswered questions and a deep sense of loss. I have never seen my father ill. One fateful day, when I was 11, my father left in a taxi with my mother never to return home. The memories of my father haunted me. I spent many years pondering why and how this could have happened. I always thought that people who went to the hospital recovered, while those who stayed home died. As I grappled with this experience, I found myself drawn to the field of medicine. At the age of 14, I decided to pursue a career in medicine, with the hope that I could help others avoid the pain that my family and I had experienced.

I was determined. I even turned down a scholarship from the aid and cooperation fund to pursue studies in agronomy to the astonishment of many. I was never meant to go far in academics; I come from a very religious family and was enrolled very early in Koranic school. Still, even at a young age, I was known for refusing to let anything stand in my way once I set my sights on achieving a goal. Indeed, I was the first in my family to actually get a formal education and even to finish high school. Upon graduation, I decided to enroll at the military medical school in Dakar to pursue a career in medicine.

As such, after graduating from the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, I pursued my surgical training in the university departments of Dakar teaching hospitals. At the end of my residency, I was appointed Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Medicine of the Cheikh Anta Diop University and consultant urologist surgeon at Aristide Le Dantec Hospital. After my residency training in Surgery and Urology in Senegal, I was accepted in a 3-year post fellowship program in Urology in France where I was privileged to work in Bordeaux under Prof. Michel Le Guillou (Uro-oncology) and Prof. Christian Chatelain (Uro-oncology). I obtained degrees in Andrology at University Paul Sabatier, Toulouse (Prof. Francis Pontonnier), and in Medical Education at University François Rabelais, Tours.

Initially, Urology was not my primary preference when it came to specializing. Nevertheless, under the guidance of an exceptional mentor, Prof. Mensah, I discovered a profound affinity for the field and developed a genuine fondness for it. Over the course of my career, I have dedicated myself to enhancing the urological well-being of numerous individuals across Africa and other regions. With unwavering commitment, I embody the principles of humanitarian service, advocating wholeheartedly for the less privileged in resource-limited settings throughout Africa. In recognition of my efforts, I was honored with the SIU Albert Schweitzer International Teaching Award in 2020 and the AUA Urology Care Foundation Humanitarian Award in 2023.

My dedication to improving urological healthcare in Africa and beyond has been channeled through various international and national organizations, non-profits, and collaborations with academic centers worldwide. I have held leadership positions in esteemed organizations such as the West African College of Surgeons (WACS), Pan African Urological Surgeons Association (PAUSA), Senegalese Association of Urology (ASU), African Society

for Sexual Medicine (ASSM), and have been an international member of medical societies including the European Urology Association (EAU), Société Internationale d'Urologie (SIU), International Society of Obstetric Fistula Surgeons (ISOFS), and the American Urological Association (AUA).

Moreover, I founded IFRU-SF (<https://ifrusf.org>) and currently serve as its director. IFRU-SF is a non-profit organization dedicated to capacity building and research in Urology and Reproductive health across Africa, I have fostered collaborations with global organizations and academic institutions and together, we have brought cutting-edge medical research and training to the continent.

I also started an outreach clinic in the town of Yeumbeul: Centre De Santé Aristide Mensah. Having officially opened just a few years ago, it is already a thriving multi-specialty clinic, serving the various low-resource communities outside of Dakar, with current efforts underway to develop a simulation and training center alongside the medical center.

An important aspect of my work has been raising awareness and promoting education in the field of female pelvic and reconstructive surgery within African urology and surgical residency programs, therefore helping previously neglected and socially marginalized women. Through hands-on surgical workshops and the development of innovative training tools like the Fistula Video Trainer and a comprehensive Fistula Manual, I have trained numerous surgeons across Africa and also contributed significantly to combating lymphatic filariasis and advancing knowledge of genetic epidemiology and clinical aspects of prostate cancer in sub-Saharan Africa through initiatives like MADCAP (Men of African Descent and Carcinoma of the Prostate) research consortium. I started MADCAP in 2009 with my friend, research collaborator, and former host at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine when I was a Fulbright scholar, Dr. Timothy Rebbeck. Under his leadership, MADCAP started with two centers (Dakar and Upenn), and now counts more than 20 centers in Africa, the USA, and the Caribbean.

My dedication to enhancing medical and surgical capacity building in Africa begins with me, as a Professor of Urology at University Cheikh Anta DIOP and Director of Urology at General Hospital Idrissa Pouye (HOGIP) in Dakar, Senegal. I have successfully contributed to developing one of the most advanced and sought-after urology residency programs in West Africa, and my trainees have gone on to lead hospitals and training centers of their own across Africa, making me proud to have planted many "Seeds of Urology."

Through my work as a clinician conducting both clinical and basic research, I have established a vast network of national, regional, and international collaborations in medical training, scientific research, and population health.

One of the central themes of my career in urological medicine is the importance of personal relationships. One relationship I hold in high regard is with Dr. Albert Ruenes, urologist based in Doylestown, PA, USA. In 2004, I invited him to Dakar to teach his surgical techniques to local surgeons. Ever since his first visit, Dr. Ruenes has returned each year to Dakar to teach African doctors a minimally invasive and cost-effective prostate cancer surgery that is well suited to the treatment needs of African men and the existing clinical facilities. The program has expanded to include fistula repair education and training.

Dr. Ruenes and I proceeded to create a non-profit organization called ASSISTS (America-Senegal Surgical Initiative, Surgeons Teaching Surgeons), which aims to eliminate the suffering caused by medical conditions endemic to West Africa by providing training and support to African surgeons. This collaboration involves American and West African surgeons working together in Senegal to improve surgical techniques and facilities while respecting local culture and customs.

ASSISTS provides training to African surgeons in contemporary techniques for treating prostate cancer and gynecologic fistula. Our goal is to establish a Center of Clinical Excellence to educate doctors in their environment and equip them to save lives. Training them locally is essential, not only for delivering treatment within their constrained healthcare system but also for ensuring the process is culturally sensitive, sustainable, and dignified.

I have never felt like I've worked a day in my life, as I've always pursued my passions. Giving back what I have received for free has been important to me, and that led to building the community health center for the people of Yeumbeul an underserved community at the outskirt of Dakar.

The populations of Yeumbeul do not have satisfactory access to local public services which makes it difficult to participate in the life of the city, to take part in, or influence the decisions that affect their general living conditions. Despite challenges such as overcrowding, poverty, and limited access to resources, Yeumbeul is a resilient and dynamic community, with a strong sense of identity and pride in its history and traditions. Unfortunately, access to primary and specialized health care remains precarious in this area. In my pursuit of giving back and making a lasting impact, I converted my house into a healthcare center that has received assistance from the National telecommunication society (Sonatel) Foundation, Dr. Albert Ruenes, through ASSIST, and charitable individuals. The Aristide Mensah Health Center operates as a private non-profit organization and is not included in the national health system. I named the center after Prof. Mensah, my mentor, who motivated me to start this initiative.

Our common project involves transforming the Yeumbeul Center into a small community hospital that provides accessible healthcare to the population. Through my almost 40 years of experience in the healthcare sector, I have come to realize that large hospitals are not necessarily the optimal solution to providing quality healthcare. Local structures can offer many services to the community, including surgical procedures, emergency obstetrical and neonatal care, management of children and the elderly, and health promotion. I hope to replicate similar projects in other parts of Senegal with the ultimate objective of positioning global health, especially global surgery as an essential component of primary care services.

In conclusion, I would say that my personal and professional journeys are intertwined and ultimately shaped who I am today. My journey helped me discover my passions and values, while my professional journey allowed me to apply these passions and values tangibly. For me, it is the tragic loss of my father at a young age that motivated me to pursue medicine and eventually led to a career in urology.

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Editor's note

Dr. Gueye served as a field surgeon for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR II) during the Rwandan Genocide. For his work, Dr. Gueye has received national and international awards, including the United Nations Medal for Peace in Rwanda (1994), as well as the medals of Officer of the Order of Merit of France, Officer of the Order of Lion Order, Senegal, and Officer of the Order of Merit of Senegal.