**University of Gitwe Medical Student Stories**

**Emmanuel’s Story**

Since I was young three jobs have always seemed important to me because of their contributions to the community: pastors, teachers, and doctors. In high school I chose to study math-physics because at that time students from math-physics were allowed to enter medical school.  When I finished high school in 2009 I took the national exam and then started preparing to apply.

However, during that time the Ministry of Education changed the system so that students who graduated with a math-physics degree would no longer be accepted to medical school.

I was devastated, but I knew that I would not give up on becoming a doctor. I decided that I would leave Rwanda and apply to school at the University of Ngozi in northern Burundi. Admission was easy there and school fees were cheaper than in Rwanda. I did well my first year and I was really enjoying studying medicine. The medicine program in Ngozi was supposed to take seven years, but that first year alone had taken 16 months because of shortages of professors. Consequently, I decided to try to apply to school in Rwanda once more with hopes that my achievements in Ngozi would strengthen my application. Nevertheless, they still would not accept my application. At that time I heard of another university that was supposedly better than Ngozi, in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo. I applied and was accepted. I spent four months at the University of Goma, but the region has significant amount of violence and insecurity. So again I applied to a different school, this time in Uganda. Things went really well in Uganda for the first three semesters. However, as I moved into my third semester it was becoming more and more expensive to take the exams, and I was afraid of how much it would cost to finish. I returned to Rwanda after four years of searching the surrounding countries for a place to become a doctor.

After that I didn’t want to look for another medical program. My search had taken too many years and I felt discouraged by all the external barriers to a good education. I decided to look for a job like many of my friends were doing. I started making money, and looked for an evening-hours bachelor program on the side for about two months. Then I heard of a new medical school at the Institut Superieure Pedagogique de Gitwe (now the University of Gitwe). I discussed with my father about all the challenges I’d had with medical school, and that after all of it, this was still my dream. Through all these years trying to find a school, becoming a doctor was still all I could think about. So we decided to give it one more try, and in April 2014 I joined ISPG. This time I was going to do my best to see it through.

ISPG is my only hope now of becoming a doctor. I take school very seriously. I’m a fourth year now with only two-and-a-half years to go. I am really feeling like I am getting closer and closer every day. Going to school in Rwanda has been a big improvement from before with social and government stability and no corruption. I am also pleased with my education with ISPG, and I feel like I am on my way to becoming a good doctor. Moreover, until this recent stop, classes have run smoothly and on time.

As with most new programs, there are many things that can be done to improve the quality of education at the University of Gitwe. There is still a need for more faculty and professors for more learning and research opportunities. They have expanded the laboratory, library, and anatomy labs, which will all help. There is also the fact that the Gitwe community still has minimal infrastructure. The roads leading to the town or gravel and pot-holed, and can sometimes take an hour to drive 20 kilometers. There is no running water, which makes cooking, bathing, and even washing hands difficult. Electricity is sometimes inconsistent so sometimes we have to wait to morning to finish working. Lastly finding Internet can be difficult. All these are challenges that make being a student a little harder.

The medical school at the University of Gitwe will bring great change to Rwanda as long as it is able to continue. It will produce more doctors and nurses every year for our country, which is so badly in need of more healthcare workers. Nearly 70% of people in Rwanda still don’t see a doctor, and the majority of the population is in rural areas with poor access. The University of Gitwe is training us to be able to take on this challenge. When I finish I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to furthering healthcare development in rural areas and to continue my training to become a future educator.

**Thaina’s Story**

My name is Ndizeye Ange Thaina, I am a 23-year-old Rwandan lady and a fourth year medical student at the University of Gitwe.

I have always wanted to become a doctor for as long as I can remember. I believe my father being a doctor inspired that feeling. Almost every child wants to become a pilot or the president, but I always wanted to be a doctor like my father, helping those who need it most. At the age of 10, my father passed away. It felt right to keep him within my memory and my being by saving lives just like he had done.

Nevertheless, my father’s death put financial stress on my family. I was the first born out of six children that my mother suddenly had to support despite the fact that she mad so little as a primary school teacher. I started to consider that medical school wasn’t still an option for me so that my mother could afford to put the rest of my siblings through primary school. However, it was hard for me to see myself taking other courses that were not medicine. I knew I had to leave the world a better place than I found it. I believed that I needed to be a physician.

My family expected me to be reasonable and take the course that I had gotten a scholarship for in order to cut down school costs, but I was not ready to give up yet! I approached my Aunty who had been kind enough to pay my high school tuition expenses as a way of helping my mother. She knew that I had always gone an extra mile during my six years of high school in hopes of going to medical school. I am very thankful that she said yes and I am eternally grateful to her. With the recent tuition increase, I am worried that it will become too much for my Aunty. She has been generous enough to keep supporting me while struggling with raising her child with leukemia.

I was fortunate enough that the year I applied to medical school Gitwe University opened. It was and still is the only private medical school in Rwanda. I applied and counted the days, hours, minutes and seconds until I received my admission letter.

That is the day my journey of living a significant life began. Living a positive life was a choice I made ever since I got into medical school. I believed that anything can happen once you set your mind to it. As of today my University is on a rapidly growing journey with great improvements coming our way. I believe it is only right that our tuition fees increased. However, there are still challenges like the lack of running water, inconsistent electricity, difficult Wi-Fi access that still needs to be worked on to make life at campus easier.

In spite of my worries I keep the faith alive. I have come so far and achieved a lot, and I have grown with my school. I am grateful for the hard work that my university has put in to get all the equipment that will enhance my class’s medical knowledge. It is one more significant step in ensuring a higher number of competent healthcare providers. Even with these improvements I know the school must continue striving for improvement. I am excited to see how it continues to grow.

I highly commend my university for creating the opportunity and great platform to train and mature future healthcare professionals in medicine, nursing, medical laboratory technology, and for supporting extracurricular activities that broaden and open our minds to different aspects of life. I intend to use the qualities that the university has instilled in me in serving my country, East Africa, and even the world at large. The world faces different health related challenges. I choose to see those challenges as a chance for me to serve and make people’s lives better and more comfortable.

**Bienfait’s Story**

I was born April 4, 1994 in Kivu, an Eastern province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). I was raised in a Christian family of 11 children. I attended primary and a part of secondary school in two different towns of DRC. When my family moved to Rwanda I completed secondary school there.

I grew up in a period of conflict and war and genocide. I’ve seen many people with debilitating illness not receive necessary care. When I was 15 one of my family members was raped and I watched her suffer from chronic disease in the aftermath. From that moment on I knew I needed to be a doctor.

After finishing secondary school I knew I wanted to study medicine, but I could not find any medical school in Rwanda. I went back to the DRC, and then to Burundi and Uganda searching everywhere, but there were so many barriers. There was insecurity associated with political demonstrations, expensive fees and regulations for foreigners, lifestyle with integration problems, and geopolitical instability.

After being deceived by all situations, I was scared of the idea of losing a great part of my dreams. My family expected so much from me, but the channel to medical school seemed closed. University of Gitwe Medical School came as a solution in a period of hard decision making. My family has struggled to overcome the financial burden of school fees along side the costs of living and raising my siblings, but we still believe that one-day the sun will shine through our hardships.

While the school has offered a good education, it still continues to grow, and there are challenges that it still must overcome. The new laboratories and library are helpful, but there are still many needs. The school is a far from the capital, in a rural area with limited water supply, and the roads are often in poor condition. There are still limited classrooms so it is sometimes difficult to do self-study in a period of exams due to the large number of students compared to the space available. Given the distance to major hospitals, we are also in need of a school bus to facilitate the transportation of our students and our leaders in the University Exchange Internship, as well as other supportive events.

Recently the school was stopped for a period of six months and was mandated by the Ministry of Education to standardize the curriculum in all aspects. I am thankful to be training in an institution that will train me to high standards, but the increase in tuition will also create more challenges for my family. My hope is that the standardized material across East Africa will make us all competitive in the workforce. I hope to eventually play a role in international medicine.

After finishing medical school I wish to be a surgeon, a professor, and a researcher. I want to help the next generation to achieve their goals. Rwanda is a country still with many challenges in terms of accessibility of healthcare, and the rural hospitals that exist still have problems in terms of infrastructure and water. I wish to actively contribute in the healthcare system in Africa. I dream of helping those in greatest need--those displaced by war, without homes, without food and water, the refugees.