

For the first time, global eye care nonprofit Orbis International is conducting intensive training in Rwanda, using its state-of-the-art Flying Eye Hospital. The initiative aims to strengthen the skills of local eye care professionals and expand access to quality eye health services across the country.

The training began on July 21 and will run through August 1, 2025, at Kigali International Airport. The program is a collaboration between Orbis, Rwanda's Ministry of Health, the Rwanda International Institute of Ophthalmology (RIIO), and Kibagabaga Hospital.

The Flying Eye Hospital is a fully equipped surgical and training facility on board an airplane. It travels around the world to provide eye care and professional training in countries with limited access to specialized services.

"This program is about empowering Rwandan professionals with the knowledge and tools they need to treat avoidable blindness and vision loss," Orbis said in a statement.



According to the organization, nearly 90% of people with vision problems can be treated or cured, but over one billion people globally still suffer from preventable or correctable vision impairment. The majority live in developing countries, and over half are women and children.

Rwanda becomes the 84th country to host the Flying Eye Hospital since it was launched in 1982. Patients with cataracts, strabismus, childhood eye conditions, and those needing visual aids are expected to benefit from the program. Advanced medical technologies will be used during treatments.

The program also includes hands-on training in modern surgical techniques such as cataract removal. Rwandan doctors, nurses, anesthetists, and biomedical technicians are participating in skills sessions, including simulations using virtual reality tools developed by Orbis.

The VR training platform allows practitioners to practice surgery before working on real patients. Orbis is also partnering with German medical equipment manufacturer Haag-Streit to offer 30 hours of VR-based surgical training.

In addition, Orbis is donating cutting-edge ophthalmic equipment to RIIO to help

improve local surgical capacity and medical education.

RIIO was established 13 years ago by Rwandan eye specialists Prof. John Nkurikiye and Prof. Cikū Mathenge. It is a member of the College of Ophthalmology of Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa (COECSA), which brings together 12 countries to train eye care professionals across the region.

Orbis emphasized that the training is hands-on, helping health workers build practical experience rather than just observing.

“This effort will contribute to long-term improvements in Rwanda’s eye care system,” the organization said.