

Peter Scheer, DDS, MS

In July 2009, Eisenhower Medical Center physician Peter Scheer, DDS, MS traveled with 46 other doctors, dentists, nurses and volunteers to the small town of Ibarra, tucked in the northern mountains of Ecuador, to deliver care to the indigent patients of that region.

An Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, Dr. Scheer operated on 67 patients, mostly children. "Unfortunately, we see a lot of facial and body burns in the children in these areas. The people cook over an open flame. They use propane to heat lard and deep fry things. Kids will touch those pots, or snag them, and they fall over and burn them. You tend to encounter some pretty severe cases."

One such case was Fernando, a teenager with significant facial and neck burns he received while playing in a park. Fernando's scar tissue began at the left corner of his mouth extending down his neck and would contract every time he moved his head. "The scar was quite severe," says Dr. Scheer. "It was pulling his lip, and limiting his range of motion. Fernando had also endured multiple surgeries. He had a lot of skin harvested from his thighs and buttocks to do the previous surgeries, so much so, that he barely had anything left. That is the part that is so impressive about him. This kid had an absolutely wonderful attitude...regardless. I was so impressed with him. He was just a great kid with an amazing attitude!"

Dr. Scheer was able to operate on Fernando by cutting to the muscle, and following the surgery, Fernando was able to move his head without limitations. Dr. Scheer plans to return to Ecuador in 2010 to help reduce some of Fernando's scarring and to help several other patients he met on this trip who presented with facial deformities.

For Dr. Scheer, another one of the major highlights of the trip was having his 17-year-old son Matthias along on the trip. "He is fluent in Spanish and ended up translating for me, and also helped me in the operating room by suctioning and passing instruments." Matthias has accompanied his father on similar trips documenting the journey through journals and photography.