

Third-World Medicine

After 22 Missions, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon Seeks an All-AAMC Mission

By Jenny Steffens

When oral and maxillofacial surgeon **Edward Zebovitz, D.D.S.**, arrived at Baltimore Washington International Airport in May 2009 for his trip to Africa with Physicians for Peace, he learned his destination of Nigeria had an imposed baggage embargo of two bags per person. With six travelers and 18 bags, the group consolidated their belongings to include only the most important supplies and medications.

“It’s always an adventure,” Dr. Zebovitz said. “You never know what to expect and you never know what you will see.”

After 23 international missions to Third-World countries, Dr. Zebovitz has seen more than most oral surgeons. His expertise and skill has touched thousands of lives – he has mended severe facial dog bite wounds, reconstructed faces ravaged by sub-Saharan flesh-eating bacteria and corrected more than 300 cleft palates and cleft lips on patients of all ages.

“My love is facial reconstruction and jaw reconstruction,” Dr. Zebovitz said. “And when you are there, you kind of feel compelled to do as much as you can.”

Dr. Zebovitz’s entry into Third-World medicine began when he traveled to the Philippines as a 28-year-old surgeon, after his father, a retired microbiologist/virologist at the National Institutes of Health, learned of the high incidence of cleft palates from a Philippine woman he regularly walked with on lunch breaks. The elder Zebovitz kept gathering information, eventually connecting his son with an organization that performed medical charity work in the Philippines.

In the 12 years since that first mission, Dr. Zebovitz’s travels have taken him around the globe, from Africa to the Caribbean to Asia.



Averaging three or four missions a year, Dr. Zebovitz dedicates all of his vacation time to his passion. “It’s very enjoyable and very satisfying,” he said. “And it just feels good to give without asking in return.”

In Jos, Nigeria, Dr. Zebovitz’s seven-day operating schedule included the reconstruction of the faces of seven patients deformed by flesh-eating bacteria. The youngest patient was age 15, the oldest 71. He also repaired cleft palates on 35 patients, including a 10-month-old infant and a 57-year-old man. A rewarding moment came after repairing cleft palates on two vibrant teenagers – sisters named Hope and Camille – and seeing them blossom after the procedure.

Dr. Zebovitz wants to coordinate an all-AAMC mission, bringing doctors, nurses and anesthesiologists together to perform life-altering medicine. **Lorraine Antel, R.N.** and **Miemie VanRooyen, R.N.**, who work in AAMC’s ICU, accompanied him to Nigeria. He also has traveled with Anesthesiologist **Peter Craig, M.D.**, orthopedic surgeon **Jeff Gelfand, M.D.**, obstetrician-gynecologist **Coryse Brathwaite, M.D.**, and surgical technologist **Rafael Romero.**

“We have such great talent and people at Anne Arundel Medical Center,” he said.

Editor’s Note: Ed Zebovitz recently traveled to Eritrea, a small country bordering Sudan and Ethiopia, in March and is planning a mission to Trinidad and Tobago in July. He will return to Eritrea in October and travel to the Philippines in early 2011. For those interested in an all-AAMC trip, contact him at drz@drzebovitz.com.



Above: Edward Zebovitz, D.D.S., poses with Obetta and Stephen, two Nigerian nursing students, on his visit to Nigeria last year, where he repaired cleft palates on dozens of patients.

Left: Before and after pictures show the repair of a cleft lip (Milliard cheiloplasty procedure) on a 3-year-old Nigerian girl.