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It's Personal

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Best Medicine

Medical Mission Ecuador

Photographer Meg McKinney documents medical mercy

A Disease of Many Faces

The personal experience of three patients battling Diabetes

Best Doctors

A comprehensive listing of top-rated local physicians



MME doctors try to create a rapport with their patients, in spite of language barriers. UAB's Dr. Nathan Alexander shakes the small hand of a little girl, who—with several other UAB plastic surgeons—he treated for cleft palate, as she and her father depart Regional Hospital, Ambato. Alexander, senior resident specializing in plastic and reconstructive surgery, was a first-time volunteer for MME.

Medical Mission ECUADOR

by Meg McKinney

Photographing Medical Mission Ecuador 2011 was an exciting invitation to the world of medicine, patients, and hospitals in a developing country. I asked a lot of questions, learned surgery room etiquette and wore scrubs every day.

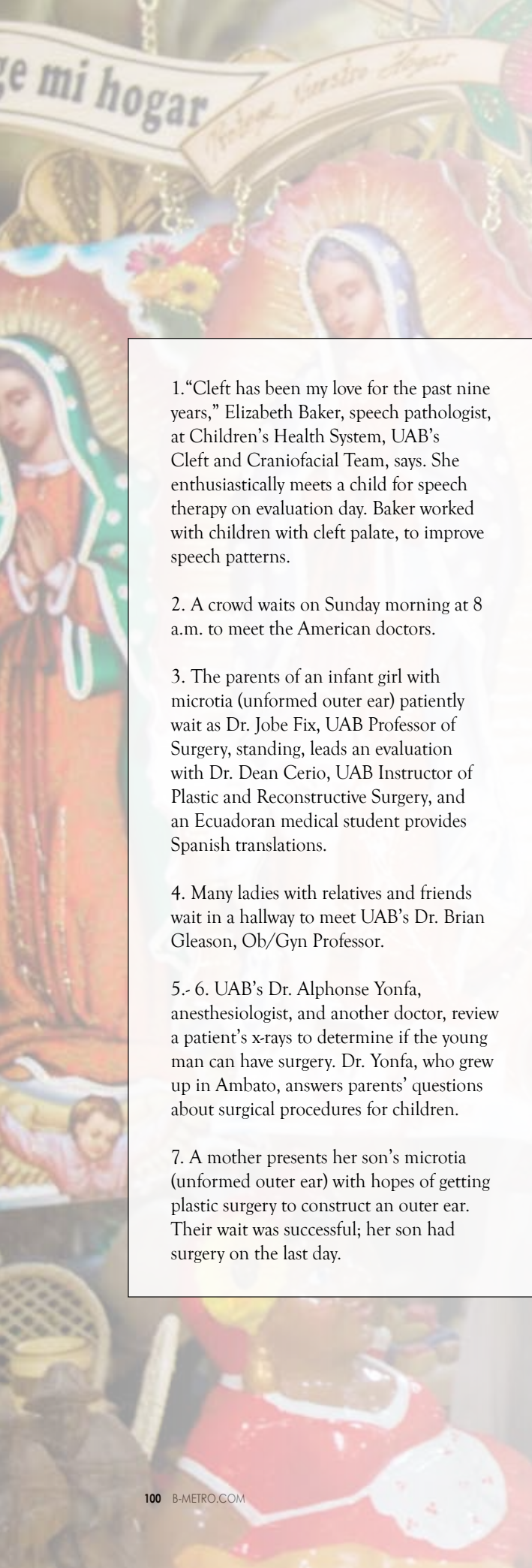
Working in unfamiliar situations among indigenous cultures is challenging, and this group of 80 volunteers—doctors, nurses, staff—gave their best work.

Every February for 19 years, MME has traveled to Ambato, a city with elevation of about 9,000 feet. Many volunteers are veterans with five, eight, and up to 19 annual trips, from 13 states. All travel and work at their own expense.

MME goes to work with energy and zeal: 547 evaluations, 519 pre-surgery evaluations; 101 reconstructed plastic surgeries, ENT, Ob/Gyn; 27 pediatric orthopedics; 23 ophthalmology, neurosurgeries; total 151 surgeries for the week.

The physical therapy team examined, evaluated, treated 380 patients; 60 patients received splints and special shoes; four patients were measured in 2010, and received prosthesis in 2011. Ten wheelchairs were given to children.

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1. "Cleft has been my love for the past nine years," Elizabeth Baker, speech pathologist, at Children's Health System, UAB's Cleft and Craniofacial Team, says. She enthusiastically meets a child for speech therapy on evaluation day. Baker worked with children with cleft palate, to improve speech patterns.

2. A crowd waits on Sunday morning at 8 a.m. to meet the American doctors.

3. The parents of an infant girl with microtia (unformed outer ear) patiently wait as Dr. Jobe Fix, UAB Professor of Surgery, standing, leads an evaluation with Dr. Dean Cerio, UAB Instructor of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, and an Ecuadoran medical student provides Spanish translations.

4. Many ladies with relatives and friends wait in a hallway to meet UAB's Dr. Brian Gleason, Ob/Gyn Professor.

5.- 6. UAB's Dr. Alphonse Yonfa, anesthesiologist, and another doctor, review a patient's x-rays to determine if the young man can have surgery. Dr. Yonfa, who grew up in Ambato, answers parents' questions about surgical procedures for children.

7. A mother presents her son's microtia (unformed outer ear) with hopes of getting plastic surgery to construct an outer ear. Their wait was successful; her son had surgery on the last day.



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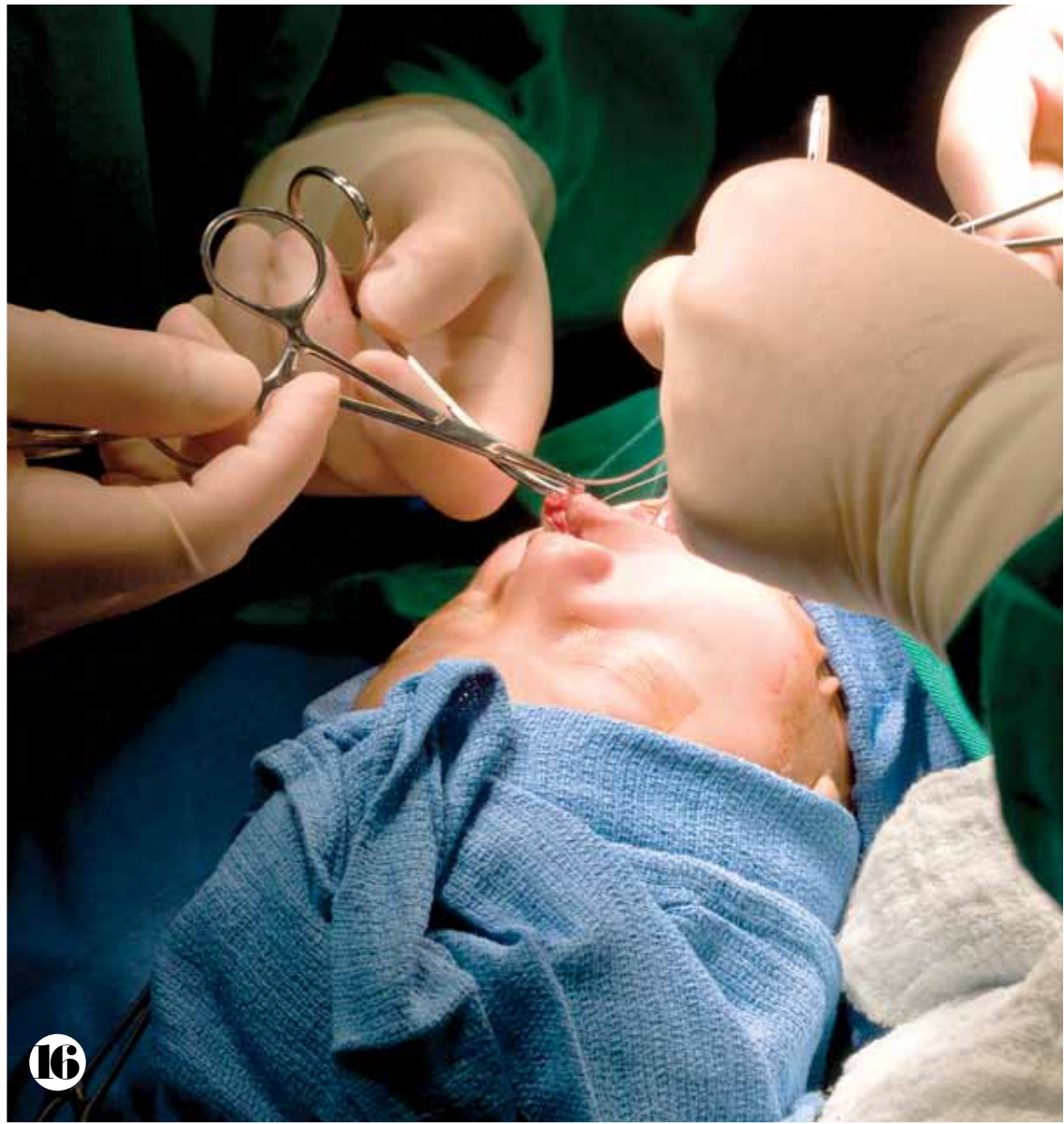
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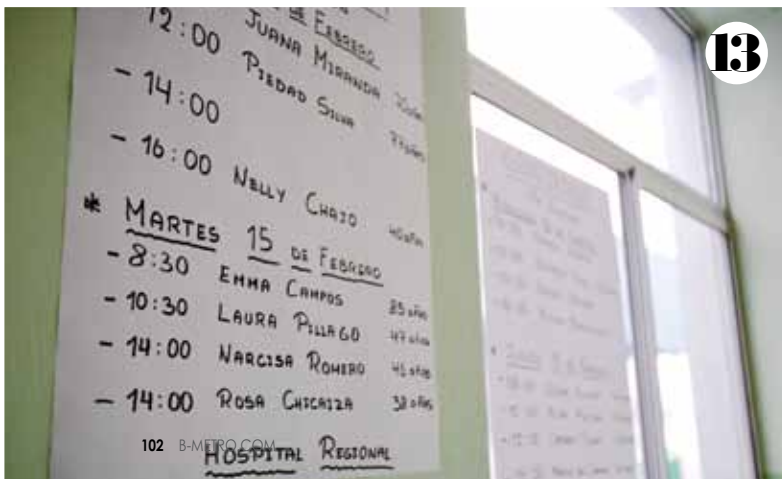
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8 It's a kick! Boys play soccer on a hospital lawn while their parents wait in line. Ten soccer balls were donated by Hibbett Sports to give to patients.

9. Anxious families wait at the doorway to the evaluation room, hoping to hear their loved one's name called.

10. Colorful skirts and sweaters are crocheted with fine yarns, and worn by indigenous women, as they wait their turn for evaluations.

11. Dr. Fix, center, Dr. Cerio, and Elizabeth Baker, work on their schedule for the week, deciding which patients will be treated this year and who must wait another year.

12. Dr. Yonfa, center, with Dr. William Shakespeare (from Utah), and Ambato Rotary members, begin to write the surgery posters.

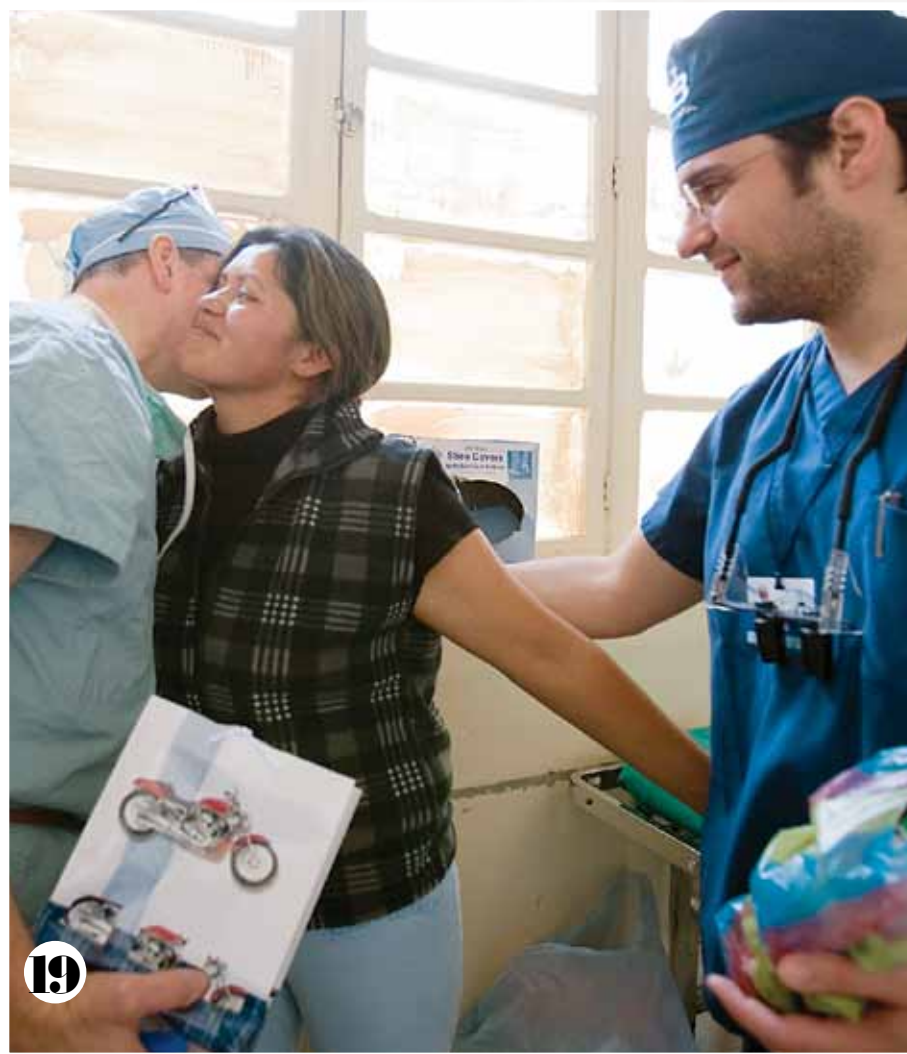
13. Hand-written posters tell patients' families the week's schedule and who is getting treatment this year.

14. Little feet peek out beneath surgical drapery, as, from left, UAB plastic surgeons Dr. Fix, Dr. Cerio, and Dr. Alexander repair the little boy's cleft palate.

15-16-17. A mother's tender embrace for her three-month-old girl, as they wait for surgery for on her upper lip. A new smile and a new life begins, as her lip is carefully repaired in surgery. The same little girl with a repaired lip faces her mother. In another year she will have a second surgery for cleft palate.



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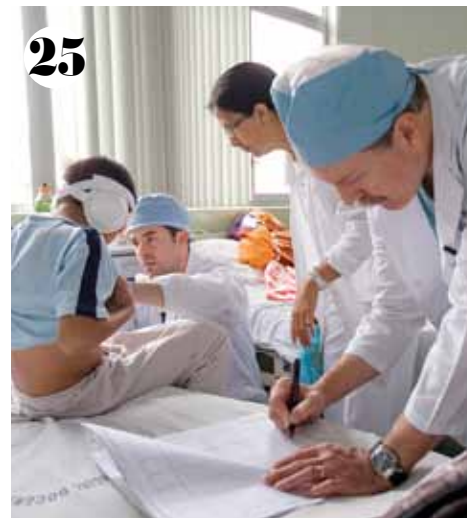
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- 18. In Ambato, MME doctors take their patients to recovery. Here Dr. Cerio quickly carries his tiny patient from surgery to recovery.
- 19. During the week, former patients will seek their doctors and present them with hand-made gifts. A former patient greets Dr. Fix, as Dr. Cerio looks on.
- 20. UAB's Andrea Maddox, RN, looks up at the surgery schedule for ob/gyn.
- 21. A mother and her child meet in recovery, following surgery.
- 22. Wearing surgical headgear, Dr. Alexander says he believes "God calls us to use our talents to heal the broken, and help the needy."
- 23. Working conditions are different than in the U.S. Improvised containers for used "sharps" appear in MME surgery rooms.
- 24. Dr. Brian Gleason, UAB Ob/Gyn Professor, has volunteered for five consecutive years. Gleason invites the chief resident for UAB's Ob/Gyn, and UAB nurses, to work for a week in Ambato.
- 25. Soft sunlight illuminates a patient's treatment, as Dr. Fix, foreground, with Dr. Alexander, complete morning rounds.
- 26. The founders of MME are two brothers and a sister from Ambato who live and work in the U.S. Shown here: Dr. Henry Vasconez, Professor of Plastic and Pediatric Surgery, University of Kentucky; Beatrice Engels, UAB, research assistant, plastic surgery; not photographed: Dr. Luis O. Vasconez, UAB Professor, Plastic Surgery.
- 27. Dr. Gleason carefully assists a female patient to recovery. The woman's family thought she was 66 years old, but they weren't sure. •