



MCKAY MCKINNON MD

Mckay McKinnon, MD, regularly receives national awards for his work as a Chicago-based plastic surgeon. But it's the missionary work he performs worldwide in places like Belize, Romania and Honduras that is his passion.

Since 1985, Dr. McKinnon has led surgical missions to Choluteca, Honduras, where he's performed cleft lip and palate surgery on more than 500 children at no cost. "These people can wait in a long line at a government hospital in the capital, and eventually they'll receive basic surgical care," he explains. "But they wouldn't receive the care any Chicagoan can get, and that's what we try to deliver."

Dr. McKinnon became involved in this labor of love as a surgical resident at the University of Miami in the early 1980s. "I saw how my chairman, Ralph Millard, extended himself to foreign patients and surgeons in Jamaica." And so, from 1982 to 1984, Dr. McKinnon made surgical missions to Belize at the invitation of the government.

Soon after, Dr. McKinnon was working in Miami, where he met Father Alejandro Lopez, a priest from Choluteca. "Father Lopez asked whether I'd be interested in helping people there," Dr. McKinnon recalls. "It turned out to be a long-term relationship."

During each mission, Dr. McKinnon performs as many as five surgeries a day, often on babies. "In the late '80s we'd see much older patients," he says. "They may have escaped surgery because their parents were too poor or ignorant to seek treatment, or wanted their

children to work the fields."

In the early years, conditions were primitive, with poor lighting, minimal equipment and no window screens. "The conditions are pretty reliable now, with a more modern hospital, equipment and supplies we bring," he reflects.

Dr. McKinnon sees an outpouring of love and gratitude from people in the town and surrounding areas, some traveling hours for treatment. "I've seen children of the children I've operated on," he says. "Even if their expressions are inhibited by language or cultural differences, it's obvious patients and families are very grateful for treatment."

Dr. McKinnon has also received worldwide attention for removing oversized tumors in adults. In 2000, he successfully removed a 200-pound tumor in an 18-hour procedure on a woman in Michigan; four years later, he traveled to Romania where, with 12 other doctors, he performed a 10-hour operation to remove an 80-pound tumor from a 47-year-old woman with a genetic disorder.

He and his team will return to Choluteca in February 2012; in addition, he'll respond to appeals for help from surgeons in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and Bangkok, Thailand.

Dr. McKinnon finds the work especially rewarding because there are no middle organizations, such as insurance companies or federal or state agencies, although the team is sanctioned by the national medical congress. "It's a simple case," he says, "of providing surgery directly to people who need it." n

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