MEET ONE OF OUR SURGEONS

You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.
~John Bunyan

MAHLON KERR, MD

A little over two years ago my wife Ashley and I attended our first Austin Smiles Gala. We were excited to go on our first mission a few months later. I am happy to say we are now veterans of four nearly consecutive Austin smiles missions with plans for a fifth this February and still excited as ever! Having visited each of our core locations (Veracruz, Guatemala City, and San Salvador) has given us insight into each unique mission plan, and joining the board this fall has helped us to learn more about our overall vision and the future of this wonderful organization. Austin Smiles has a long tradition of helping children in all of these locations, and we are working on plans to further our mission model to provide more support and stability for ongoing care after the team goes home and starts work for the next trip.

This year in El Salvador we are excited to evolve our model of cleft lip and palate care. Plastic surgery organizations in general have a long history of showing up, operating, and then packing up to go home. The difficulty with this approach is it provides little to no long-term care, and does not do a great job of keeping track of children as they age and approach the next stage in their cleft care. As some of you may not know, most children with clefts will require multiple operations throughout their childhood. This is often poorly understood by the families of children with clefts. As a result these children often miss the correct age for their next surgery, or fail to have it all together. Back home in the US these problems rarely happen as the planning for treatment and support resources are carefully managed.

We are excited to start bringing this new structure to El Salvador in 2019. Hopefully we will roll this care plan to all of our locations eventually. By partnering with local clinics we hope to bring a more stable transition in dental and speech care after we leave, and by utilizing electronic medical records keep better track of our patients. Using a more team oriented approach we hope to lose less children to follow-up, and provide an overall higher level of care. This new transition will hopefully evolve into each separate mission location over time. Our goal is to slowly teach these underserved communities to fish for themselves rather than just serve them a quick meal with a single surgery. Ashley and I remain as excited as ever, and we look forward to the San Salvador trip this February as the start of a new chapter in the long history of the Austin Plastic Surgery Foundation.

“I am grateful to be a part of Austin smiles, and excited to help write a new chapter in the history of the Austin Plastic Surgery Foundation.”