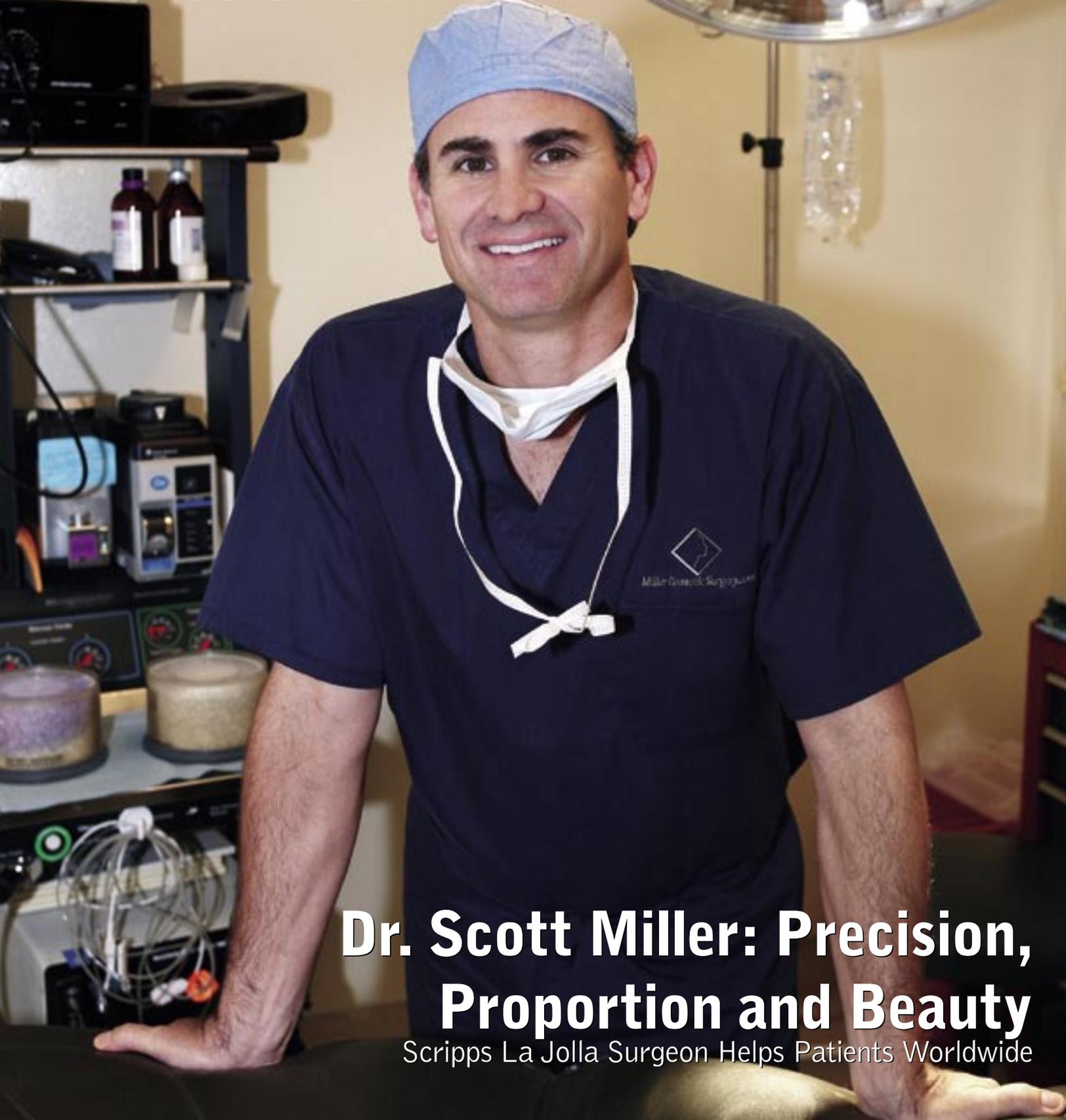


M.D. NEWS

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Dr. Scott Miller: Precision, Proportion and Beauty

Scripps La Jolla Surgeon Helps Patients Worldwide

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By Donna Kozik

“Good hands, good judgment, kindness and knowledge equal one great surgeon!” These are the words Dr. Scott Miller’s father inscribed in an artistic anatomic atlas presented upon his son’s graduation from medical school. When the future Dr. Miller was 10 years old, it was the compassionate, timely action of his father, also a physician, which ignited an interest in medicine and surgery.

“We were at a department store when a security guard got stabbed. Without hesitation, Dad ripped off his shirt and held pressure to the wound until the paramedics came,” he remembers. “I was impressed with his technical ability to save a life and his poise to do so. How many lives would have been altered if he didn’t have that ability? It made me want to be able to do that.”

Which direction his medical practice would take was determined when, as a young man, he watched former Scripps Clinic surgeon Dr. Stephen Miller (no relation) operate on a child with a disfiguring scar on his cheek. “He used plastic surgery techniques to reorient the scar so

Dr. Miller performing a thread-assisted cheek lift on a patient with early signs of aging.



PHOTOS BY GRAHAM BLAIR



Dr. Miller demonstrating surgical procedures for a national training video.

it faded into the contours of his face,” says Dr. Miller. It impressed the budding surgeon who, with a background in drawing and oil painting, soon realized that plastic surgery was the field for him.

The precise artistic and reconstructive work was not the only feature that attracted him to the profession. It was also the concept of caring for individuals to support their self-image and self-esteem. Dr. Miller now has his own Scripps La Jolla practice, the Miller Cosmetic Surgery Center, where he contributes daily to the quality of people’s lives.

“Plastic surgery has the artistic and creative outlet I need,” he says, adding that it also combines technical skill and even a touch of athletics. “Preparing for a surgery is like preparing for a big match,” says the former collegiate competitive tennis player. “You think through the case, get a good night’s sleep and have that excitement before performing. To get things looking just right, with minimal scars, takes creative thought and logical solutions applied in a meticulous and skillful way. There is satisfaction in seeing immediate positive results from your work.”

COSMETIC VS. RECONSTRUCTIVE

There’s some debate in the medical field about whether plastic surgery is primarily a matter of reconstruction or aesthetics. “There’s



As the lead instructor for Surgical Specialties' Regional Training Center, Dr. Miller teaches plastic surgeons advanced facial rejuvenation techniques.

been an artificial wedge put between the two schools of thought," says Dr. Miller. "But a burn reconstruction uses the same surgical techniques as, say, fixing a webbed earlobe. I just work along the continuum to get my patients the best results.

My daughter needed to be reassured just as much as I did. I felt like they related to her and her concerns about the surgery.

— April Hunsaker

"I believe that it's all cosmetic to some degree," he says. "Treating a child's cleft lip and performing a facelift are somewhat the same — you're restoring the facial anatomy, to a more normal state in one case and more youthful in the other. In both instances, we've met our patients' needs by restoring their anatomy to an aesthetically pleasing, natural state."

CREDENTIALS — AND CARING

Dr. Miller is board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and is a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the California Society of Plastic Surgeons and a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. He has been awarded for service by the PSEF (Plastic Surgery Educational Foundation) and ASAPS (American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery) and he is the Co-Director of Surgical Specialties' plastic surgery teaching courses for the West Coast Regional Training Center, training and certifying other plastic surgeons in advanced aesthetic and reconstructive plastic surgery techniques. His Scripps La Jolla facility, Miller Cosmetic Surgery

By focusing on quality care, Dr. Miller and his staff are able to develop a personal relationship with each patient.





Dr. Miller removes microsutures on a male face- and necklift patient.

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— Dr. Scott Miller

Center, was recently featured as a highly successful practice model in a national plastic surgery journal and he is frequently sought out by the media as a consultant on plastic surgery issues.

Along with the high credentials, Dr. Miller believes strongly in caring for patients as if they were family members — with honesty and empathy. “I tell them the truth and what I think is right for them,” he says. He doesn't look at plastic surgery like the fast food business where people come in and order certain procedures.

“First you find out what they want to accomplish, what's holding them back and how they can achieve it,” he says. “And then it's old-fashioned medicine at work. You get a history, do an exam, discuss the alternatives and arrive at a personalized treatment plan with the patient.”

Miller believes that some have a misconception of what plastic surgery can do. “Plastic surgery does not turn an unhappy person into a happy person, it does not save a bad marriage or get you a promotion,” he says. “What it can do is solve the things that are bothering you and distracting you from being your best and living the life you seek.”

TAKING TALENTS ABROAD

Since 1995, Dr. Miller has been a member of Interface, an international health care educational exchange of knowledge and skill. Over the last 30 years, Interface has delivered over \$15 million in care and provided over 5,000 surgeries on more than 150 international trips. Teams of plastic surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, dentists and speech therapists share their time, expertise and emotions with people in developing nations. The organization, founded by Dr. Jack Fisher and guided by the administrative efforts of Kathy Mayo, focuses on

caring for people with congenital and acquired physical deformities.

It's another reason Dr. Miller was drawn to plastic surgery — to do missionary-type work such as Interface. “The logistics of other types of medicine don't allow it. You can't be a heart surgeon and go abroad and do what we do. Plastic surgery is an amazingly 'hi-touch/low tech' field overall, and we can do a tremendous amount of good quickly in a fairly primitive setting, helping 30 or 40 people in the course of a day,” he says.

Miller, who with his wife Lisa has three children, goes once or twice a year on Interface missions to South America. “I think such work is setting a great example for my kids,” he says. “Although it's time away from them, I come back a better family person. They are growing up with a good sense of ethics and service.”

Another aspect of Interface includes an educational exchange where the volunteers teach international surgeons techniques to care for their own countrymen, thus fulfilling the communities' needs in the future as well as the moment. It also provides books, journals and tools to international surgeons and sponsors travel to the U.S. for patients with particularly complex problems.

“It engenders such good feelings and that's real diplomacy — one face at a time,” says Miller.

Since 1995, Dr. Miller has seen some children in desperate need of help, including one whose chest didn't fuse so the heartbeat was visible through the skin. He's also treated many burn victims whose injuries meant they couldn't move their arms or separate their fingers. In all, he's helped hundreds of patients so they can lead a more normal life.

Interface also benefits the doctor. On a recent trip, as a four-hour triage session was coming to an end and the team was preparing to begin the first of many surgeries, Dr. Miller was approached by a mother and her 4-year-old son. They had been waiting patiently in line to give him a hand-carved wooden etching. The etching was made by the child's uncle, who, along with the whole family, wished to express his gratitude for the cleft lip and palate repair Dr. Miller had performed on the child several years before. “I was struck that they even remembered me, and more so that, being of little means, the family had found such a touching, heartfelt way to convey their appreciation,” he says.

Most of all, he was pleased to see the smile and hear the clear speech of the little boy and know that the child was welcomed, and not ostracized, by his community. “It's a great feeling for me to help a child who is living with a potentially socially debilitating situation. Instead of being undernourished, inactive and socially reclusive, he becomes an interactive, well-adjusted contributing member to his family and society,” says Dr. Miller.

What plastic surgery can do is solve the things that are distracting you from being your best and living the life you seek.

— Dr. Scott Miller



A patient before and after having complex facial reconstruction by Dr. Miller for a skin cancer defect.

CONTRIBUTING AT HOME

Back in his La Jolla offices, a good deal of Dr. Miller's work also centers on helping others achieve a feeling of comfort with themselves. "If you can see what's bothering people and solve their problems, then you've really been a success — because you've freed their minds to concentrate on far more important items, like family and other things they love," he says.

Dr. Miller regularly performs surgery on skin cancer patients who've had facial scarring due to the disease and its treatment. It again brings up the question of whether his work is reconstructive or aesthetic. "A financial analyst I recently treated for facial disfigurement after skin cancer excision may consider what I did reconstructive. Nevertheless, there were aesthetic features involved," he says. "If I just patched things, he wouldn't feel comfortable in his everyday work environment as an executive. We enabled him to continue to be a dynamic businessman, relaxed in what he does and who he sees."

"My goal is to put someone back into the day-to-day world we all live in so they feel comfortable. Right or wrong, appearance plays a big part in that," says Dr. Miller.

Another patient, Susie Warfield, was in a severe car accident in February 2000 and suffered life-threatening pelvic fracture and serious injuries to the top of her head and left side of her face.

"I basically scalped myself," says Warfield, who felt uncomfortable when working with 100 patients a week at the large ophthalmology center where she's employed. "My eye was almost sewn shut after the accident — I looked like 'Dr. Evil' from *Austin Powers*. It was very difficult to look in the mirror and look other people in the eye."

Warfield had treatment from two other plastic surgeons, but neither was able to give her the results she sought. It made her leery of having more surgeries. However, after meeting with Dr. Miller she acted on a leap of faith and chose him to perform an endoscopic temporal brow lift and structural face and neck lift with scar revisions and fat grafting.

Now Warfield goes to work confidently — and is happy to meet the patients coming into the ophthalmology center. "When people look at my face now, they don't realize I had such scarring from my car accident. I'm 44 and people say I look like I'm in my late 20s. In fact, I probably look better now than I did in my late 20s," she says enthusiastically.

Warfield refers friends and family to Dr. Miller "because his work is exceptional. And at end of day, that's why I feel comfortable referring people to Dr. Miller — it's because

he gives great results."

Going through adolescence is hard enough, but 13-year-old Suzanne Hunsaker found it especially difficult. When she was an infant, she had lifesaving surgery for gastroschisis, a condition where her intestines were outside her abdomen and she was left with severe abdominal scarring.

"It wasn't life threatening," says Suzanne's mother, April, "but she didn't like the way her stomach looked. It made her very self-conscious." After Suzanne underwent suction assisted lipectomy for reconstruction of her abdominal contour, she was pleased. "Before, there was a bump on my stomach because of the scar. Now it's 10 times better — it's flat," she says. The teenager added that she appreciated Dr. Miller answering all her questions and calming her nerves before the procedure. "I thought the pain was going to be horrible, but it wasn't that bad," she says.

Her mother appreciated Dr. Miller's expertise and his staff's attentiveness. "They were interested in her feedback, not just mine," says April. "She needed to be reassured just as much as I did. I felt like

Interface engenders diplomacy — one face at a time.

— Dr. Scott Miller

A child before and 2 years after having his cleft lip and palate repaired.



they related to her and her concerns about the surgery.”

Most of all, “as an active 13-year-old, the improvement has allowed her to interact with her peers with more self-esteem and confidence,” says Dr. Miller. “She’s ecstatic because she feels normal.”

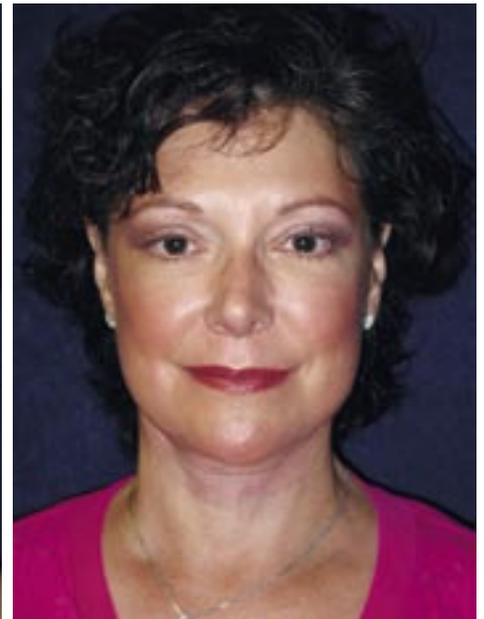
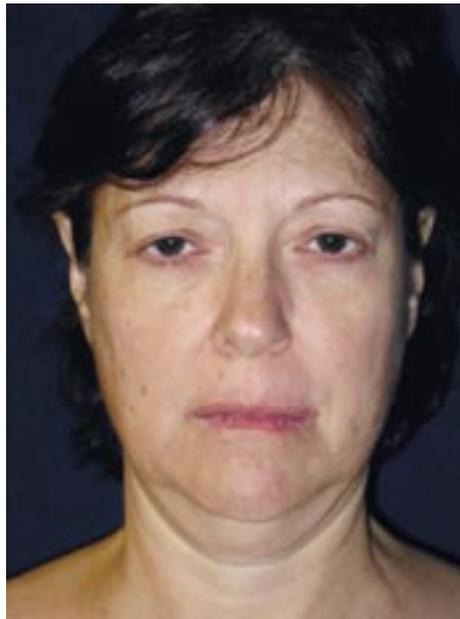
SATISFACTION IN TEACHING

Although Dr. Miller finds helping patients person to person gratifying, be it abroad or at the Miller Cosmetic Surgery Center, he also finds teaching others to be equally fulfilling. He’s an attending surgeon at Scripps Memorial Hospital in La Jolla, a voluntary clinical assistant professor of plastic surgery at the University of California, San Diego, the author of numerous articles along with a chapter on facelift advances in a principle plastic surgery textbook. He lectures and leads courses nationwide and abroad for the Surgical Specialties Corporation and AngioTech Pharmaceuticals and recently worked with Dr. James Chao to attract their Regional Training Center to UCSD.

“When you teach, you multiply your efforts exponentially,” he says. “You can share your expertise and talents with more people. You can touch more lives.”

It also gives him a chance to pass on the education he learned from those he calls giants in the field: Dr. David Furnas, a pioneer in craniofacial/cleft lip and palate surgery; Dr. Bruce Achauer, a burn reconstruction specialist; and Dr. Bruce Connell, a legend in the field

Dr. Miller utilized reconstructive and cosmetic techniques to achieve a natural, aesthetic result for a victim of a severe motor vehicle accident.



Before and 6 weeks after total facial rejuvenation by Dr. Miller using contemporary endoscopic techniques.

When people look at my face now, they don’t realize I had such scarring from my car accident.

— Susie Warfield

of facial rejuvenation. “They were all role models and teachers,” he says. “Now I can build on that legacy of innovation to help advance the principles and practice of plastic surgery.”

Dr. Miller knew he wanted to be a plastic surgeon long ago and that he would enjoy the meticulous work and patient care, but “one of the unexpected joys of my practice is working with high-quality people on a day-to-day basis.” His outstanding staff consists of Olivia Sartain, R.N., surgery center coordinator; Tracy Byrne, R.N., operating room nurse; Teresa Nunez, operating room technician; Betsi Walker, office manager; Gina Dickson, patient coordinator; and Nicole Mayer, front office coordinator.

At the end of the day, Dr. Miller knows it’s all about focusing on his practice’s values of safety, quality, integrity and service. “Patients are putting a humbling amount of faith in the hands of their surgeon. It’s something we have to treat with respect and appreciation — and something to live up to.” As his father inscribed, “good hands, good judgment, kindness and knowledge equal one great surgeon!” ■

Miller Cosmetic Surgery Center
www.millercosmeticsurgery.com
(858) 453-3133

