

NYUCD and the Internet Change Mexican Man's Life

We sometimes take the miracles of modern medicine and surgery for granted in this country; however, people in other countries do not. A young Mexican man suffering from a severe facial deformity went to extraordinary lengths to come to the NYU College of Dentistry for surgery.

Flavio Munoz, 23, of Tampico, Mexico, got a "new face" last spring, thanks to his persistence, the Internet, and the skills of Dr. Stuart Super, associate professor of surgical sciences (oral and maxillofacial surgery) and director of the Dr. Stuart and Tibby Super Center for Dentofacial Deformities and Corrective Jaw Surgery.

"I think that people underrate me," said Flavio before the surgery. The reason people may have underrated Flavio had to do with a birth defect that had left the entire right side of his face smaller than his left and deformed the rest.

On March 16, Flavio underwent a major facial reconstruction performed by Dr. Super at Bellevue Hospital, which did much more than change the way he looks. It also freed him from mounting depression. Flavio says that his depression began when he was 19. "I felt ridiculous and guilty for feeling depressed, because, after all, thank God I didn't have any serious problems. I am healthy, I have my family. But I couldn't help thinking about wanting to have [corrective] surgery and not being able to [because of the cost]. That, besides my frustration about the way I looked, caused me distress, anxiety, panic attacks, agoraphobia. I couldn't sleep. I would wake up in the middle of the night screaming."



Flavio Munoz



But Dr. Super allayed all of Flavio's fears by convincing him that surgery could change his whole life—that he would feel better about himself and be able to compete successfully in the world. "The very first time I spoke to Dr. Super," says Flavio, "all my worries and fears disappeared instantaneously, like magic."

Flavio's craniofacial reconstruction involved freeing his upper jaw and straightening it. Then the lower jaw was split and moved forward. A new chin was fashioned, and a silicone cheek implant was inserted. To fill out the indented part of the face, an artificial bone implant was custom carved.

Almost as amazing as the surgery itself is how Flavio got to New York. The previous October he had found Dr. Super's Web site at www.facesthatsmile.com/ and applied for help to the Dr. Stuart and Tibby Super Foundation for Dentofacial Deformities and Corrective Jaw Surgery at NYUCD. Dr. Super, an internationally known oral and maxillofacial surgeon, has volunteered his services to treat people with facial deformities from all over the

world and agreed to operate on Flavio without charge. But Flavio needed additional funds to travel to and from Tampico.

Through another Internet search, Flavio found the World Craniofacial Foundation on the Web at www.craniofacial.net/worldcf/. The Dallas-based foundation arranged his transportation to New York City through yet another long-distance organization, CareForce, which uses donated Continental Airlines mileage from frequent fliers to provide free transportation to people in need of health care.

When Flavio left New York three weeks after surgery, his face was still a little swollen, and his jaw would have to stay wired shut for another few weeks. But already it was possible to see the contours of a handsome face emerging. "Most people would think that I exaggerate," Flavio wrote to Dr. Super after returning to Tampico, "but thank you for saving my life."