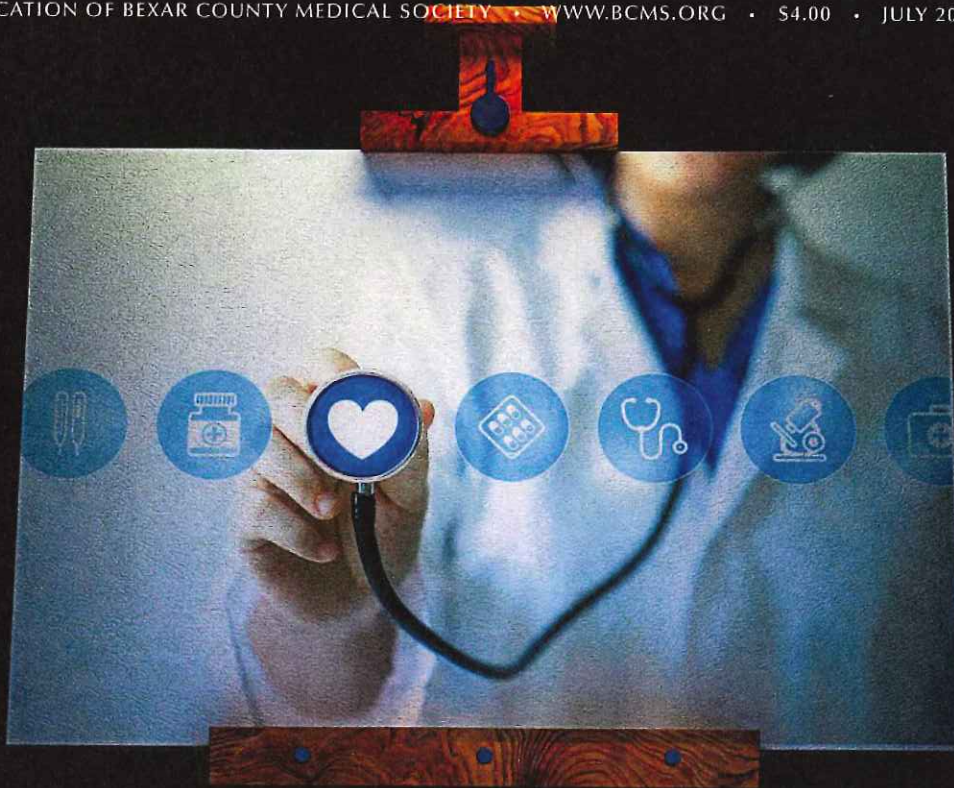


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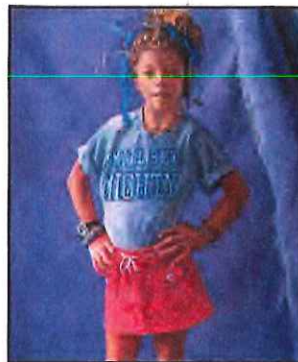
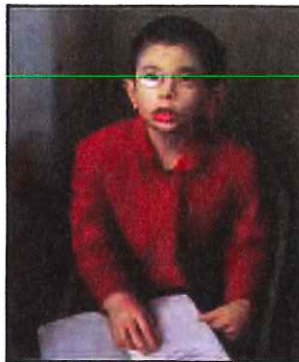
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THE MERGING OF ART AND SCIENCE

Face to Face: The Craniofacial Program Portrait Project

By Kathleen Waller Stewart, MD

“Face to Face: The Craniofacial Program Portrait Project” is a unique partnership between the Craniofacial Program at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), the Edwin and Fannie Gray Center for Human Appearance at The University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and Studio Incamminati, an art school in Philadelphia dedicated to the techniques and principles of humanist realism. Through this program, the first of its kind in the United States, professional artists paint highly personalized portraits of children and adolescents with craniofacial conditions with the goal of enhancing the lives of all involved.

The Inception

“Face to Face” was the joint brainchild of two remarkably accomplished men who happen to be close friends. Linton A. Whitaker, founder of the Craniofacial Program at CHOP, had a vision that went beyond repairing cleft lips and palates, which was the pinnacle of craniofacial plastic surgery when he began practicing his craft. Dr. Whitaker has developed one of the world’s most recognized Craniofacial Plastic Surgery programs whose mission deals with a multitude of rare and complex craniofacial anomalies that challenge children and adolescents.

Nelson Shanks (1937-2015) was an internationally-renowned artist celebrated for his exquisite ability to portray the human condition through his innovated approach to color as seen in his figurative works and portraiture. In partnership with his wife, Leona Shanks, Studio Incamminati, School for Contemporary Realist Art, was founded in 2002 in Philadelphia. Nelson Shanks’ commissions include a vast array of world leaders, including Pope John Paul XXIII, President Bill Clinton, the five female Supreme Court justices and,

Princess Diana, to name a few. Dr. Whitaker and Mr. Shanks shared a love of aesthetics and beauty, a natural communion between a plastic surgeon and painter of the human form. Their conversations on this topic gave birth to the “Face to Face” venture, which was launched in 2013.

The foundational concept was for artists affiliated with Studio Incamminati to paint the portraits of individual children and adolescents with craniofacial anomalies. Staff psychologists from the Edwin and Fannie Gray Center for Human Appearance followed these children along with their families closely during the process to assess the impact that this project had on psychosocial functioning and sense of well-being. The ultimate results of this endeavor have exceeded all expectations.

The Logistics

The Craniofacial Program at CHOP recognizes that the complicated surgical approach to caring for these children is only a portion of a larger battle. The psychosocial hurdles facing each young patient are myriad and complex. Every child must deal with issues related to disturbed body image and subsequent poor self-esteem.

In order to create a multispecialty, holistic and comprehensive program focusing on these challenges, the physician surgeons at CHOP work closely with the Edwin and Fannie Gray Center for Human Appearance at University of Pennsylvania. Not only is physical disfigurement considered a paramount issue for these children, but there are a multitude of other medical issues that surround speech, eating, hearing, and breathing.

The psychological well being of each child is addressed concomitant with the physical. The array of craniofacial conditions encoun-

tered is vast and includes rare genetic disorders such as Treacher Collins Syndrome, Alpert Syndrome, Pfeiffer Syndrome, Moebius Syndrome, and so many others.

Fourteen young patients have participated thus far in the “Face to Face” program. The children were paired with a professional artist affiliated with Studio Incamminati. Each portrait, painted in oil, was completed over multiple sittings (as many as 20). The children’s parents, and sometime their siblings, accompanied the sitters to each visit. The many hours that the artists, children, and their families spent together aided in developing strong trusting relationships, a necessary ingredient in capturing a intimate portrait.

The Results

The children, their families, and the artists agreed at the outset to undergo in-depth interviews about their experiences both prior to and after the individual portraits were completed. Evaluations of these multiple interviews clearly demonstrate the very positive impact that the “Face to Face” portrait program had, not only on the patients, but the families and the artists as well. Without exception, these children experienced superior overall psychosocial functioning. The most notable impact was observed in the arena of improved self-image, which created an enhanced sense of empowerment in each child.

The role of a portrait painter is not only to create a like image of their sitter on the canvas, but to capture that person’s depth of character and the nuances of their psyche that combine to portray the specific uniqueness of the individual. The artists uniformly found the experience both moving and personally enriching.

Conclusion

In today’s society, physical appearance affects our daily lives in countless ways. In particular, much of an individual is revealed and communicated by the human face. At the outset, these children with craniofacial anomalies cared for by the multispecialty team at the Craniofacial Program at CHOP did not view themselves as “portrait worthy.” Partly through the process of having their portraits painted by the professional artists affiliated with Studio Incamminati, these children have come to believe that the world can view them as people of value. This merging of art and science has resulted in a healing role in the lives of these remarkably strong and resilient patients.

Please visit www.studioincamminati.org and click on "In the Community" to read more and to watch a short video further describing this program with interview of the children, their families, the physicians and artists.

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