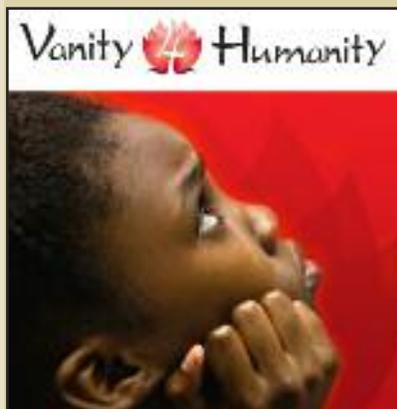


by DONALD ROLAND, M.D.



A Charitable Evolution

After finishing a Plastic Surgery residency at The Albert Einstein College of Medicine I had two desires in the field of Plastic Surgery: First, to be very good at what I do, and second, to enjoy doing it. That basic formula was carried out for many years as I performed major reconstructive surgery for the City of New York at HHC. There I performed advanced microsurgical reconstruction on head and neck cancer and trauma patients, as well as emergency limb salvage, for nine years.

Many long nights were spent in those operating rooms quietly concentrating on trying to help people. As my career progressed I began applying this experience to my growing cosmetic practice. My patients liked that I was well versed in reconstruction and they often would come back for cosmetic procedures after meeting me through their reconstructions. The idea of enjoying what I was doing became more difficult as I began noticing that a large amount of my staff's time went into associating with insurance companies on reconstructive cases. Pre-authorizations, contract negotiations, and collection of payment became a game of cat and mouse.

In 2008, I decided to restore the harmony back into my practice by parting ways with managed care reimbursement, and instead to concentrate my private practice on cosmetic surgery. This decision allowed me to establish my charity, Vanity 4 Humanity, to provide reconstructive plastic surgery pro bono instead.

Initially, Vanity 4 Humanity's mission was to provide breast cancer reconstruction to the underserved female population in the Dominican

Republic (DR) where this type of surgery is lacking. This is my wife's native country, and breast reconstruction incorporates everything that I think plastic surgery is about. It's helping people after surviving cancer, it's creating a breast from various ingenious methods, and it's incredibly gratifying work.

Therefore, in December of 2009, we went on our first mission to D.R. and performed these procedures, as well as general plastic reconstruction cases, in conjunction with the Divino Nino Foundation. This is our sister charity started by Juan Romero. Juan is a restaurant owner of Dominican descent, with his restaurant in the shadow of Citifield. His foundation began by sponsoring children from his native hometown in DR to come to Long Island for life-saving surgery.

The feeling of helping others in need on that first surgical mission was something that my wife and I both found very rewarding. I reconnected with why I became a doctor. So when I heard Anderson Copper asking for medical help during the Haitian earthquake a month later in early 2010, I decided to go try to help. I boarded a plane seven days after the disaster without much of a plan other than trying to meet up with medical personnel there. It worked, and soon I was heading towards Port au Prince in a medical convoy. I worked in two operating rooms along the way, settling in a small field hospital that wasn't operational before the disaster. The Haitians displayed such grace in their hour of need that I blogged about what I was witnessing nightly. I had a cameraman friend get on a plane and film what was truly an amazing display of human compassion.

With my wife's organizational skills here in the Manhattan office, and the contributions of many friends and patients, we were able to mount our own relief effort. Most notably, an expensive skin grafting machine was purchased and shipped to me within a day of my asking, thanks to these donations. This saved hours of OR time, allowing me to have all of our patient's dressings changed every 48 hours, which kept infection at bay.

Vanity 4 Humanity was able to organize continued plastic surgery coverage and housing accommodations for these surgeons until the need subsided. Since the Haitian earthquake we've teamed up with a Haitian orphanage in the north of the country. Vanity 4 Humanity has operated in the orphanage's town and is involved in planning and staffing an operating suite currently being built on the facility's grounds. Twice a year surgical missions have continued to the Dominican Republic, as well with three children currently being tissue expanded there to treat their burn contractures.

Vanity 4 Humanity's evolution from solely performing breast reconstruction, to include general plastic reconstruction and then disaster relief, has been a wonderful thing to be a part of. I've met some incredible patients, doctors and laypeople along the way, all the while continually being amazed by what the human spirit is capable of.

IMAGE

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