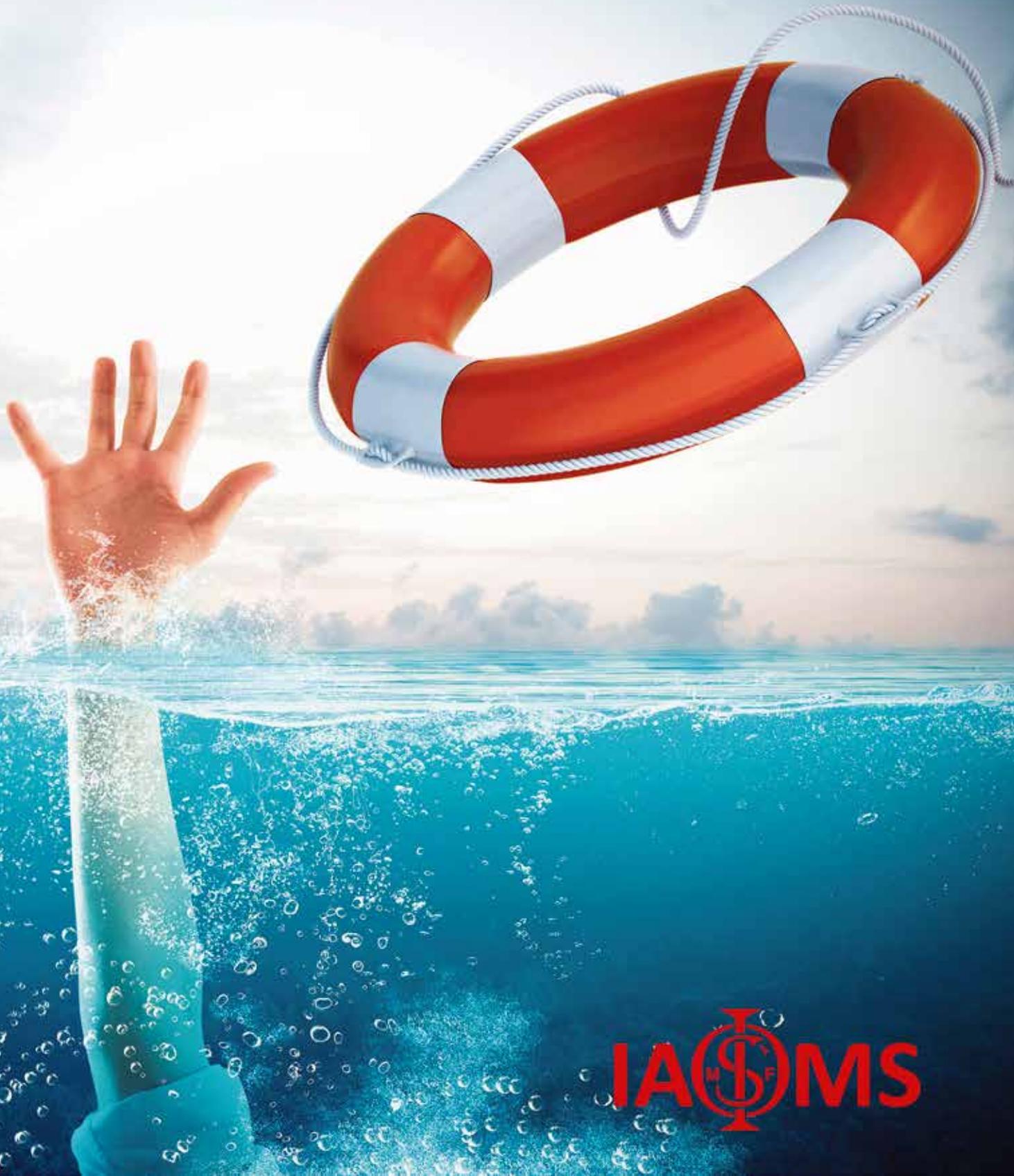


FACE ^{TO} FACE

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ON A MISSION, PERMANENTLY



IAQMS

02

Surgery in **Dictatorial Times**

By **Humberto Fernández Olarte**
El Bosque University, Bogotá (Colombia)



Dictionaries define dictatorships as "an authoritarian form of government, characterized by a single leader or group of leaders, with the faculty to enact and modify laws at will". What a poor definition! Excluded in this definition, are words such as hunger, suffering, abandonment and illness. What else have I missed out?

That's where I will go, where I've gone several times, all of them accompanied by residents. They have learned that serving is not just an option, it is an obligation. Simón Bolívar _the Liberator_ once said: *"It is not enough to be big, it is necessary to be useful"*. The action must be motivated by a simple word, whose true meaning is not understood most of the time - love. There must be love for our profession, and we must not confuse this love for infatuation, which is the state of being carried away by an unreasoned passion in the heat of the moment.

Just as many times in the past, on this occasion I took a flight to Cúcuta (Colombian city located in the northeastern part of the country, on the border with Venezuela), where undergraduate students from the local Antonio Nariño University took me to the border, where I was received by good friends of mine, all of

whom were Venezuelan surgeons, to cross on foot to the other side. The fact of crossing sounds like a simple thing, but doing it is very different from actually just feeling it. Seeing a whole population walking in the opposite direction, passing in front of me, possibly with thoughts and hopes of never returning... what a deep sensation of pain!

Hours later, we arrived at San Cristóbal, where we met a group of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, who came from several cities from around the country to help, serve, and operate. We all think alike; we are not alone, we are many, we are a team! I am obviously not the only one with the same thought.

That night, we shared a dinner among friends, enjoying the pleasures of the local food that graced our table. Meanwhile, I can't avoid to stop looking out





"It is not enough to be big, it is necessary to be useful".
 Simón Bolívar

the window, at the street, where there is hunger in every corner, and I feel impotence.

The night passes, and the next morning the academic exchange that nourishes our specialty, begins. However, my mind can't remain idle, it keeps on thinking about the next day in the operating room, where we will find a very harsh reality, not only with those people dealing with a physical misfortune, but also with those people dealing with hurt souls. By this time, I don't have any doubt: we will make a change, affectionately working for a group of children with cleft lip and cleft palate, for which hunger and malnutrition have been sad companions. Together with their families, these little patients see in us an opportunity, and hope for a better life. Such a great responsibility!

What a beautiful setting I have before me ... the operating rooms! It looks like a magical place, in which for some strange reason, nobody is prey to hunger or fatigue, and if someone experienced something like that, it remains imperceptible. It is impossible not to experience the feeling of a heart beating with all its strength. At the end of the day, we feel the satisfaction of the work done, overcoming the limited material resources by using our unlimited human will.

Once the mission is complete, I must return to my country, to my family... how many of the people we met wouldn't love this opportunity! I must return to my duties as Director of the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Residency at the University El Bosque - Bogotá, Colombia. I definitely returned more motivated and more convinced of my obligation to teach and train... and I ask myself all the time: how do you teach yourself to love? To fall in love with this



specialty? Is it impossible to include this subject in our programs? I bet we would have more of us willing to serve... to gift of ourselves to others.

In Colombia there are several foundations that are dedicated to operate children and adults with facial malformations; serious entities that assume their work with respect and dedication. Congratulations to each of them! In the same way, I would like to extend this acknowledgement to all those people around the world who dedicate part of their lives to this beautiful work. I also want to thank my University for all its support, and to my residents (why my residents? because they are a part of me) for their endless motivation.

My respect and love for all those who are focused on doing and not on pretend, for whom I dedicate the following thought: *"When the essential thing is the money, the art of healing loses its true magnitude of greatness"*

Serving we will meet