

DR. KIMBERLY COCKERHAM

REBUILDING LIVES - FACE FIRST

by rebecca flansburg · photography by briggs photography · makeup by maria lagana-sales

"Our face defines who we are both personally and professionally. Our face reveals our unique character as we express our emotions that define our identity," reveals Kimberly Cockerham, MD, FACS. "But for those who suffer facial disfigurement and dysfunction, the experience results in loss of self-esteem and significant life challenges."

Dr. Cockerham is an ophthalmologist with subspecialty training and two decades of experience in eyelid, eye muscle and facial reconstruction. As a decorated Army veteran, she has committed her professional career to helping people from all walks of life rebuild their lives "face first."

Dr. Cockerham was raised in San Mateo, California, and began her medical journey as a volunteer at a local community hospital's burn unit while in junior high school. The hands-on interaction further inspired her goals to work within the healthcare industry despite her modest family background. She earned her emergency medical technician degree and volunteered on ambulance crews. Dr. Cockerham helped pay for college by working as phlebotomist at the VA hospital while earning her undergraduate degree at University of California, San Diego.

On acceptance to George Washington University Medical School in Washington, D.C, she was awarded an Army scholarship as the only woman in her national class. Once in the military, she completed a general surgery internship at Letterman Army Medical Center and then spent a year in the field coordinating care via helicopter between emergency rooms in Newport News, Virginia Beach and Hampton Roads, Virginia. Her efforts earned her a prestigious ophthalmology residency, fellowship and her position as the Chief of Ophthalmic Plastics and Reconstruction at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. She had the honor of providing care for soldiers injured in Operation Desert Storm,

Desert Shield, Bosnia, Somalia, the Beirut bombings and other conflicts.

Dr. Cockerham is an adjunct associate clinical professor at Stanford University. She enjoys inspiring clinical research, providing insights for Silicon Valley companies and lecturing nationally and internationally. She loves to teach and mentor students and health professionals. Making a difference matters deeply to her.

In her private practice, Dr. Cockerham provides personalized medical and surgical care with a focus on eyelid and facial enhancement. Her newest office in Lincoln Center opens in August; this office will focus on bio-regenerative therapies that use growth factors and stem cells to promote wound healing, combat scarring and optimize anti-aging.

Many know Dr. Cockerham as an honored clinician and surgeon who has attained notable achievements such as being listed among the Who's Who in American Women and Who's Who in Medicine, and being elected by her peers to Best Doctors in America annually since 2006. She has also been awarded two University of California San Francisco Star Awards for Excellence, an American Academy of Ophthalmology Achievement Award, Senior Achievement Award, Distinguished Service Award and a Special Recognition Award. But Dr. Cockerham is especially proud of her military service awards, including the National Service Ribbon, two Superior Unit Awards, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal and Meritorious Service Medal.

Her hope is that this article will introduce you to Let's Face It Together, her non-profit foundation that provides medical and surgical care for patients without the financial means to address their facial disfigurement and dysfunction. "The Let's Face It Together Foundation was an insight-



ful idea that came from one of my underserved patients," Dr. Cockerham remembered. "My time in the military taught me to honor and respect my patients and their families and also to understand the larger role physicians can play in a community. I remain very committed to helping the underinsured and their families rebuild their lives and do so 'face first.'"

Let's Face It Together is a 501(c)(3) non-profit with a mission of helping individuals and families thrive despite healthcare challenges. The foundation has touched the lives of many by restoring health, confidence and self-esteem to people with significant facial alterations. The foundation also strives to put the "care" back in healthcare by focusing on helping patients return to being productive and content members of their community. The foundation not only works to provide medical and surgical care to patients with a demonstrated medical and financial need; it also assists patients in navigating the complex healthcare system via credible advice, on-line educational resources, advocacy and seminars.

"If you are in a motor vehicle accident and your head hits the window in such a way that it results in traumatic injury to your facial bones, insurance companies will 'put you back together' to the point that they think you deserve," Dr. Cockerham added. "They typically will pay to fix your broken bones but you could still be left very disfigured. Any reconstructive work or prosthetics then becomes an out-of-pocket-expense. Unfortunately, most people cannot pay for these things on their own so they are forced to 'live with it' due to flaws in our healthcare system."

The Let's Face It Together Foundation identi-

fies people in need and works to help them regain their confidence and quality of life. "When we take on a new patient within our foundation, we refer to it as 'adopting' them," Dr. Cockerham noted. "We work closely with our LFIT families on every aspect of their recovery journey including things like advocacy, transportation, basic medical care and reconstructive surgeries. These patients become like family to us because their medical and surgical care often spans several years. We also become an advocate for them by working to get them services that their insurance may say they can't have. The foundation is here to provide emotional support as well; we help them adjust to their 'new normal.'"

"Please help the foundation raise funds to help more patients in need," Dr. Cockerham requested. "Donations buy medicines, medical supplies, surgical supplies and prosthetics. All health professionals donate their time and expertise." New this year, the FACE IT app for your smart phone makes it easy to donate to the Let's Face it Together Foundation. The app allows you to enjoy virtual visits and ask questions about your own cosmetic or medical concerns. The app also affords users the ability to buy products online, arrange a visit to the office, conduct post-operative evaluations or begin the process of qualifying for Let's Face It Together assistance.

Dr. Cockerham's Skin Science line, KCMD, is designed to combat scarring, hyperpigmentation, inflammation and to promote wound healing. It also features an anti-aging line, and all KCMD sales are donated to Let's Face It Together Foundation to pay for the topical therapeutics for patients in our community.

"This foundation is all about helping people get back on track. We want to help our neighbors who have suffered facial damage and devastation to be able to have the confidence to look people in the eye again," Dr. Cockerham concluded: "We want our adoptees to be the best they can be in life and not feel limited by their injury."

"This Foundation is all about helping people get back on track. We want to help our neighbors who have suffered facial damage and devastation to be able to have the confidence to look people in the eye again," Dr. Cockerham concluded: "We want our adoptees to be the best they can be in life and not feel limited by their injury."

"I am blessed to have a wonderful and supportive husband who is in medical leadership for the Veterans Administration Health Care System and active in the foundation. Our two teenagers volunteer for the foundation and in doing so they are learning about what is important in life." **HLM**

If you need help, Let's Face it Together Foundation is here for you. If you can donate time or expertise, please help. For more information, visit LFITFoundation.org, download the new app to interface virtually, or email Dr. Cockerham directly, CockerhamMD@gmail.com. One hundred percent of KCMD proceeds are donated to Let's Face It Together Foundation. Dr. Cockerham and Let's Face It Together Foundation serve the communities of Lodi, Manteca, Stockton and Tracy. Visit CockerhamMD.com for more information or call (209) 461-2172.