

From the community

# Skokie Ophthalmologist participates in medical mission to Honduras; Helps restore sight to indigent patients



By **Chris Martin** Community Member  
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Ophthalmologist Stuart Sondheimer, MD, from Skokie, Ill., examines a patient in the village of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, during his medical mission trip last week.

March 8, 2012—Skokie, Ill.—The ability to restore sight is an eye doctor’s greatest reward. To do this in a surgical mission trip is wonderful and life changing.

That’s what Skokie ophthalmologist Stuart Sondheimer, MD, and his volunteer colleagues accomplished during their medical mission trip to San Pedro Sula, Honduras last week.

Dr. Sondheimer, a Skokie, Ill. ophthalmologist, a Florida Ophthalmologist, Dr. Jeffrey Levenson, and a Honduran Ophthalmologist, Dr. Diego Mejia, participated in a medical mission trip sponsored by Surgical Eye Expeditions (SEE) International, Inc. and Vision Outreach International—both international humanitarian organizations dedicated to providing world class medical care to those in serious need of health care, by partnering first world and third world eye physicians to work together to help people who would otherwise remain visually impaired.

The physicians chose Honduras because of the toll staggering poverty, drug trafficking and political turmoil has taken on the Central American country. Half the population of Honduras, approximately 3.7 million people, live below the poverty line and it is estimated that there are more than 1.2 million people who are unemployed, with the rate of unemployment standing at 27.9%.

“Common eye problems like cataracts, which are easily treated here in the U.S., are debilitating tragedies in countries like Honduras,” he said. Sondheimer traveled to the Central American country with Dr. Jeffrey Levenson from Jacksonville, Florida.

In addition to treating blind people in Honduras, Dr. Sondheimer is also helping to raise money to buy local host physician, Dr. Deigo Mejia, a modern Vitrectomy instrument so Dr. Mejia can bring the ability to restore the sight of patients with diabetic retinopathy and other vitreoretinal diseases in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Dr. Mejia is being trained in Vitrectomy Surgery by a volunteer Denver, Colorado Retina Specialist, Stephen Petty, M.D.

Last week, Dr. Sondheimer, Dr. Levenson, and Dr. Mejia treated 17 patients with cataracts, who would otherwise have not been able to see, including some very dramatic cases. One patient had been shot eight times while working as a deliveryman. He had developed cataracts in one of his eyes but the doctors were able to successfully treat him and restore his vision.

“I operated on a man who only had one eye that had the ability to see who was completely blind and now can see for the first time in many years,” Sondheimer said. “We all three come away better physicians and people for having these moving, stimulating, and satisfying experiences.”

Last year, Sondheimer traveled to Hue, Vietnam to participate in a similar trip to bring U.S.-based eye care to distressed socio economic regions of the world.

## About Dr. Stuart Sondheimer

Among the first surgeons in the U.S. to offer surgical correction for nearsightedness, farsightedness, and astigmatism, Dr. Stuart Sondheimer has performed over 20,000 eye surgical procedures treating cataracts and the need for glasses. He has shared his knowledge by teaching other ophthalmologists, residents and medical students. Dr. Sondheimer understands the LASIK procedure from the patient's perspective since he has undergone vision correction surgery himself. He has also corrected the vision of several of his family members in addition to having performed vision correction surgery on other physicians.

Dr. Sondheimer is a native Chicagoan and lives in Wilmette with his wife, Bonnie. He has offices in Skokie, Deerfield and Park Ridge. The Sondheimers have six children, and he devotes much of his time away from his practice to his family and is active in civic affairs.