

Doctor: Boy shot in face is on long road to recovery

■ Loma Linda University Medical Center doctor is optimistic about 14-year-old Jeremy Elliott. But the youth faces more surgeries over the next two years.

By PAMELA FITZSIMMONS
Sun Staff Writer

LOMA LINDA — Had the shotgun blast that hit 14-year-old Jeremy Elliott been an inch higher or an inch lower, he would be dead.

Instead, it tore away the left quarter of his face and he lived.

Four weeks after Jeremy was shot — allegedly by an 11-year-old girl — his doctor is optimistic.

"Jeremy is recovering nicely," Dr. Douglas Hendricks said Thursday in a press conference at Loma Linda University Medical Center.

Although Jeremy may never look normal, two surgeries have restored much of his face and jaw.

"A week ago today he spoke his first words. . . . He is improving daily in terms of cognition and thinking. He was able to do some math problems yesterday," Hendricks said.

The San Bernardino girl is accused of injuring Jeremy and killing Evan Clark, 14. Police said the two San Bernardino boys were standing in the front yard of the girl's North Vermont home when she fired her mother's 12-gauge shotgun through the living room window.

The shooting occurred about 4 p.m. July 18. Two 12-year-old boys, who were friends of the girl, also were in the yard.

The San Bernardino County District Attorney's office is considering whether to file murder and attempted murder charges against the girl and charges of negligent storage of a firearm against her mother.

Hendricks compared Jeremy's injuries to those of Richard Faciola, the principal at Sacred Heart School in Redlands who was shot in the face in January 1995 by a student armed with a sawed-off shotgun.

"He had similar surgery but not quite as severe, and he is very happy with the result. I expect Jeremy will end up taking the same course," Hendricks said.

The youth is expected to be released from the hospital in about six weeks and will undergo more surgeries in the next two years.

Hendricks has treated more than a dozen people with major facial injuries from shotguns, many of them self-inflicted by people attempting suicide.

"Jeremy's is the most significant in terms of missing tissue," Hendricks said.

A CAT scan of the boy's head before surgery looks like an ex-

3 families reel from shootings

By PAMELA FITZSIMMONS
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SAN BERNARDINO — When Evan Clark and Jeremy Elliott were gunned down on July 18, it devastated three families:

The Clarks, who lost their son; the Elliotts, whose son was seriously injured; and Sue Madison-Heaberlin, whose 11-year-old daughter is accused of shooting the 14-year-old boys.

"We want to ensure that someone else's child does not end up on either end of a firearm in the future," Jeremy's father, Bruce Elliott, said.

For that reason, he hopes the District Attorney's office will file charges in the case.

"Parents and guardians must be held responsible and accountable for the actions of their minor children," Elliott said Thursday, the first time he has spoken publicly about the shooting.

"I cannot comprehend how a mother could go off to work and leave an unsecured firearm and high-powered ammunition at home with two unsupervised minor children. This is an incident waiting to occur, and it did."

Madison-Heaberlin has declined to comment, said Ira Madison, her brother and an attorney.

Since the shooting, Elliott and his wife have been spending their days and nights at Loma Linda University Medical Center. Only now have they had time to think about what could await them in court.

Prosecution of the mother and her daughter could act as a deterrent to other needless violence, Elliott said.

"We feel as a family, with God's help, we can forgive those who are responsible. But . . . we still have to hold these individuals responsible and accountable for their actions and neglect."

Boy: Doctor optimistic about recovery from shooting

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Position occurred on the left side of his face. He lost the flesh and muscle from his cheek bone down, about 75 percent of his jaw two-thirds of his teeth, a third of his upper lip and 50 percent of his

lower lip.

Jeremy's father, Bruce Elliott, recalled looking at his son within several hours of the shooting. "I wasn't sure if I was seeing what I was really seeing, the father said.

Hendricks' first step in reconstructing Jeremy's face was assessing what was missing and figuring out how to replace it. Three days after Jeremy was shot, he had his first reconstructive surgery.

"We picked Sunday morning 7 a.m., a light day around here. . . . We worked throughout the day and night and finished at 7:30 the next morning," Hendricks said. When it was over, Jeremy's shoulder blade had been re-

moved and fashioned into a new jaw. Muscle was transplanted from his back to his sinus cavity and skin had been grafted for his cheeks.

In a photograph taken Thursday, the dark-haired youth would be recognizable to people who knew him before the accident. He looks good considering what he has been through. Surgical sutures around the new section of his face, but those will fade. His lip are distorted, but a future surgery will address that.

Other future surgeries will re-establish his ability to chew. He will be fitted with dentures. Although he can blink his left eye and move his forehead, he has no other movement on the left side of his face. He may undergo sur-

geries similar to that of a recently publicized case involving a young girl who could not smile.

Jeremy has not seen himself. He probably won't until he asks for a mirror. Hendricks said that indicates they are usually psychologically ready in a narcotic condition to help keep him comfortable and ensure that he does not disturb any of his surgical sites.

Jeremy spoke for the first time last week when Hendricks held his finger over the boy's tracheotomy tube.

He hadn't said anything in three weeks. Life for him since the shooting has probably felt like a dream, Hendricks said. "He's been crying tears when he heard his voice and when he heard his own voice and was very frightened. . . . Jeremy probably realized he wasn't dreaming."

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