

matters: features

African visit for Addenbrooke's surgeon

“Ethiopia is a country where there isn't a proper cleft lip and palate surgery service – I saw teenagers, people in their 40s and 60s who had never had an operation.”

A surgeon from Addenbrooke's has taken his skills to Africa to help cleft lip and palate patients.

Per Hall, consultant plastic surgeon, is Addenbrooke's lead clinician for cleft lip and palate services. Per took his skills to Ethiopia – a country larger than the UK, yet one which doesn't have an established cleft treatment programme. Subsequently, there are an estimated 40,000 children and adults with untreated cleft lips and palates living in the country.

For ten days, Per joined up with Operation Smile – an American-based charity which aims to provide treatment in Ethiopia and establish a training programme.



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Working alongside fellow surgeons from across the world, Per operated on dozens of patients of all ages. At Addenbrooke's, which is one of nine designated cleft centres in the UK, Per would only ever expect to see very young children requiring surgery. While in Ethiopia, he saw patients as old as 60 who had never received any form of treatment.

Emotional

Per says: “Ethiopia is a country where there isn't a proper cleft lip and palate surgery service and yet the population of Ethiopia is about 79 million. They will have more babies born there with cleft lips and palates than in the UK but no-one is operating on them.

“I saw teenagers, people in their 40s and 60s who had never had an operation on their lip.”

Some patients went to extraordinary lengths to see

a surgeon – one young boy was reported to have made a nine-hour donkey trip followed by a further four hours by bus just to reach the hospital, based in the city of Jimma.

Joining Per on the trip was his wife Sarah, who worked as a photographer documenting patients before and after surgery.

Per says: “Perhaps the most moving picture is of the boy looking at his new lip in the mirror. He was 15 years old and lay still under local anaesthetic whilst I operated on his lip, which had never been repaired. We gave him a mirror at the end and he just stared at himself transfixed. This shot summarises many emotions for me – a picture paints a thousand words.”

Per's trip was generously sponsored by the Cleft Lip and Palate Association.

