

CLEFT FACTS

Cleft lip and palate is one of the most common congenital deformities, occurring at a rate of one per 500 to 700 births worldwide. This rate varies substantially across different ethnic and geographical areas.

In some developing countries there appears to be a high mortality rate in babies with an unrepaired cleft palate, probably due to feeding difficulties, as the baby may be unable to suck sufficiently because of the hole in roof of the mouth.

Many patients in the developing world are not able to access the specialist care and often live a lifetime in isolation because of their unrepaired cleft. These children who don't receive reconstructive surgery develop problems with feeding, speech, hearing and developing social skills. Exclusion from education, employment and society is significant and has great consequences on both individuals and their families.

This team of medical volunteers are dedicated to improving the lives of patients with cleft, and their families, providing them with renewed self-confidence. Patients have a chance of living a happier life, no longer hiding, and feeling accepted within their community. It is very inspiring to hear about the sustainable cleft care in the developing world and about a life-changing cleft surgeries.



CLEFT CARE IN THE UK (from NHS and BAPRAS website)

- ▶ A cleft is a gap or split in either the upper lip or the roof of the mouth (palate) or sometimes both. It occurs when separate areas of the face do not join together properly when a baby is developing during pregnancy.
- ▶ A cleft lip and palate is the most common facial birth defect in the UK. One in every 700 babies is born with a cleft. The type of cleft and how severe it is can vary widely between children.
- ▶ Babies with a cleft may have problems feeding, particularly if the cleft includes the palate because the baby may not be able to suck adequately. However, with assistance and sometimes the use of a special feeding bottle, feeding can usually be quickly established.
- ▶ The UK has a well-developed service for the treatment of cleft with;
 - eleven specialist centres dedicated to the surgical repair of clefts
 - an outreach nursing network. Babies born with cleft are seen within 24 hours of diagnosis by a specialist nurse.
 - babies are treated by an expert multi-disciplinary, team, what may include the following; Surgeon, Cleft Nurse, Orthodontist, ENT Surgeon, Paediatrician, SLT, Psychologist, Maxillofacial Surgeon, Genetics.
- ▶ All surgery is carried out by consultants who have extensive experience in this area, and whose main specialty interest is cleft lip and palate. For cleft lip, surgery normally takes place around three months after birth and for cleft palate, surgery takes place between six months to one year. These resources, and this wealth of expertise, have led to improved patient outcomes in recent years.

