

Operation Smile Organizational History

Operation Smile is a children's medical charity with a presence in more than 60 countries across 6 continents committed to continuing and furthering our efforts to improve child survival and health around the world. By mobilizing more than 5,000 highly-specialized volunteer medical professionals from 76 countries, Operation Smile provides free reconstructive surgery and associated services for children born with facial deformities as well as children in need of surgery due to injury or other maladies.

Operation Smile has nearly 30 years of experience providing surgical and associated medical services for patients, as well as related medical education and training for local health professionals. Operation Smile works collaboratively with local and national governments and ministries of health, local hospitals, teaching institutions, professional associations, private companies and local nongovernmental and civil society organizations to create sustainable programs around the world. Operation Smile is a registered, nonprofit organization in the United States, headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia.



Laura, before and after surgery

Ongoing Research

Operation  Smile



Every three minutes, a child is born with a cleft condition. Operation Smile is conducting innovative research to better understand clefting and identify its causes, so we can work toward preventing and diminishing the incidence of cleft lip and cleft palate.

Our research is focused on determining the physical and psychological effects on those affected by the deformity, as well as finding ways to best serve this population with optimal care and treatment.

Research is an integral part of working to prevent and treat cleft lip and cleft palate throughout the world, and Operation Smile is collaborating with leaders across numerous disciplines to conduct this essential work.



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Operation Smile Research Initiatives

Some of Operation Smile's research focus areas include epidemiology, genetics, surgical procedures, speech pathology, dentistry, anesthesiology and psychology. Essential research is being conducted within Operation Smile's Comprehensive Care Centers to investigate and understand the efficacy of various approaches and practices in the management and delivery of cleft treatment around the world.

Examples of ongoing research projects include:

International Family Study - Understanding the Genetic and Environmental Factors Leading to Oral Cleft

This study aims to provide the basis for sustainable international research collaboration to better understand the genetic and environmental factors that cause cleft lip and cleft palate. It is doing so through the establishment and use of a centralized biorepository for genetic samples, clinical data, and environmental exposures.



Multi-Factorial Systematic Assessment and Evaluation of Post-Operative Outcomes

These assessments and evaluations are designed to continuously monitor and evaluate multiple aspects of surgical practices and outcomes to establish and maintain optimal practices and care. Areas of assessment include: surgical techniques, types of sutures, status of patient's oral health, cleft severity, and nutritional status.



Importance of the Nutritional Status in Surgical Outcomes of Patients with Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate

This study explores the magnitude of malnutrition among cleft lip and cleft palate patients and their risk of undesirable outcomes following surgical intervention based on their nutritional status.



Short-term Speech Outcomes in Late Cleft Palate Repairs

This project explores whether patients who undergo a surgery at a later stage in life without accompanying speech therapy experience any improvement in consonant production errors.



Importance of Cleft Category Differentiation in the Study of Associated Factors

The aim of this pilot study is to explore gender differences and evaluate common environmental factors and their associations with specific types of clefts in a heterogeneous population sample.



A Cross-Sectional Comparison of Cleft Lip Severity Across Populations

The goal of this study is to stratify the presentation of oral clefts based on their severity in distinct populations and compare the observed results, searching for any patterns across the study populations.

Reliability of Spanish Articulation and Resonance Ratings Collected on Digitally-Recorded Samples

The purpose of this study is to help in the development of a perceptual assessment tool for use in the clinical practice among Spanish-speaking populations. This tool could be used to systematically record, report, and analyze speech outcomes after cleft palate surgery and/or speech therapy.

