

## References

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### Re: “Orofacial cleft management by short-term surgical missions in South America: literature review”

In light of the article by Best et al. regarding short-term surgical missions as a means to deliver surgical expertise and alleviate the growing demand for surgical care, especially as it relates to patients with congenital orofacial clefts, we offer you this summary of Smile Train’s supported programs and model in the region as a proven successful alternative to addressing such needs<sup>1</sup>.

Since 2000, Smile Train has supported local hospitals and cleft care professionals across the Americas through funding and capacity building initiatives. The organization’s footprint in the region spans more than 112,000 cleft surgeries and 224 hospi-

tals in 25 countries since inception. More specifically in South America, Smile Train has supported the work of cleft teams to provide more than 60,000 cleft surgeries through its sustainable partnership model. Currently, Smile Train’s treatment partnerships in South America include approximately 200 surgeons at more than 150 local hospitals across eight countries, and will continue to grow as the organization works with dedicated medical professionals and other supporters to expand patient access to safe, timely, high-quality cleft care within South America.

Smile Train’s success has been achieved by utilizing its ‘teach a man to fish’ model, which at its core is committed to training and empowering local medical professionals and hospitals to provide 100% free, safe, quality, comprehensive cleft treatment. It is important to mention that some of the leading global cleft lip and palate institutions are based in Mexico and Central and South America, and Smile Train is proud to support their efforts to train the next generation of cleft care providers. Smile Train also leverages cutting-edge technology and innovative training techniques to enhance and grow its long-term, sustainable solution, not only in the Americas, but in 85+ countries around the world<sup>2</sup>.

Smile Train does not rely on short-term surgical missions to meet the needs of the populations it serves, rather it ensures timely treatment and follow-up is available on an ongoing basis year-round, by empowering local providers with funding (to cover certain costs associated with treatment), education and training, community outreach and awareness, medical equipment and supplies, patient and family resources, or other types of essential support, depending on the specific local needs. This support is provided to ensure that patients in need can access treatment without suffering financial ruin until the professional or hospital is able to ensure the availability of treatment for these patients without Smile Train support. Using this bidirectional partnership model, Smile Train is able not only to ensure the availability of cleft care, but also to increase cleft surgical capacity. Short-term surgical missions may address the immediate cleft care needs, but by design they are not equipped to offer the same level of longitudinal effectiveness that the

partnership model can provide<sup>3</sup>. As Smile Train’s programs in the Americas continue to grow and close the gap between new cleft births and primary cleft treatments, we will use the tools at our disposal, as well as continue to develop more, to put medical professionals dedicated to cleft at the frontline of innovation and patients at the center of safe and top quality comprehensive cleft care.

#### Funding

None.

#### Competing interests

Smile Train — Chairman of the Medical Advisory Board.

#### Ethical approval

Not required.

#### Patient consent

Not applicable.

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