

# Promoting Sustainable Interdisciplinary Cleft Care: The Global Smile Foundation Model

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**C**lefts of the lip and palate are leading congenital defects with varying global rates, affecting nearly 1 in 700 births. Despite efforts of the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery to increase access to surgical care in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), access to basic medical care is lacking and an unmet burden of disease persists.<sup>1</sup> Even though Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) contribute to delivery of cleft care in LMICs, efforts should focus on developing and implementing sustainable cleft care.

Global Smile Foundation (GSF) ([www.gsmile.org](http://www.gsmile.org)) strives to achieve universal sustainable interdisciplinary cleft care, with our volunteers having been involved in outreach cleft programs for over three decades. GSF implements a diagonal model of care delivery during every surgical outreach program, combining advantages of the vertical and horizontal care delivery models. The diagonal care delivery model provides much needed care by our visiting teams to help alleviate the burden of disease while also strengthening and investing in local infrastructures.<sup>2</sup> Our interdisciplinary teams compose of experts in cleft care to ensure the highest and safest quality of care rendered and to provide our patients with the much needed quality care that they deserve (Figure 1). These efforts allowed the establishment of our Comprehensive Cleft Centers in Guayaquil, Ecuador and Beirut, Lebanon that provide continuous surgical, dental, speech and psychosocial support for patients and their families, with patient follow-up documented on our own customized Electronic Medical Record (EMR) (Figure 2). GSF also aims to empower on-site providers through fellowship training programs such as the GSF Cleft Surgery Training and NasoAlveolar Molding Training Programs. Additionally, GSF organizes

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yearly International Comprehensive Cleft Care Workshops ([www.cleftworkshop.org](http://www.cleftworkshop.org)) that rotate back to the same continental region every three years and that provide didactic lectures and simulation training by world experts in the field to enhance the quality of Interdisciplinary Cleft Care rendered by the cleft healthcare providers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the healthcare system worldwide, and LMICs have been especially affected. Precipitous travel bans and flight cancellations resulted in suspension of many surgical outreach programs, accentuating the gaps in access to timely surgical care. In the face of these challenges, GSF had to promptly acclimate to deliver uninterrupted care, follow-up and support to our patients. As a result, GSF, Fundacion Global Smile Ecuador and GSF– Middle East & North Africa relied on novel technologies such as telehealth to ensure post-operative follow up of our patients and to deliver speech, feeding and psychosocial support. We believe that adequate follow-up strengthens and promotes trust, respect and confidence between our visiting teams and our onsite providers as well as our patients and their relatives. GSF has also pioneered Augmented Reality Surgery to remotely proctor surgeons.<sup>3</sup> This has allowed the delivery of surgical repairs by our onsite partners, and under GSF's supervision. This initiative has certainly enhanced the training and confidence of our onsite partners.

## References

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