

Project Number: CC020

Title: Early communication skills in children born with cleft palate with or without cleft lip.

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Scientific Outline:

It is known that 50% of children born with cleft palate and/or lip (CP+/-L) will have difficulties with speech sounds at some point in their development (Albery, 1989; Peterson-Falzone, Karnell & Hardin-Jones, 2010). Some reports, looking at non-cleft individuals, suggest that early difficulties with communication may persist and lead to problems in later childhood (Bates et al, 1979; Eadie et al, 2010). If this is also true for children born with CP+/-L we can identify those who show difficulties in the acquisition of early language skills and therefore may be at greater risk of having long-term difficulties with speech. This would enable Speech and Language Therapists to plan and provide the appropriate support.

The aim of this project is to investigate whether the early communication skills of children born with CP+/-L differ from typically developing children and if so, how. We will use data collected from the Cleft Collective parent questionnaires at 18 months to investigate the range of early communication behaviours of children born with CP+/-L. The primary analysis will use data from section G13 in the 18month questionnaire completed by mothers on the early communication skills of children with CP+/-L. This data forms part of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (Squires, Twombly, Bricker and Potter, 2009). We will then compare the data to the communication behaviours of typically developing children using standardised normative data which is available from the test manual of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). Of all the parent-completed questionnaires for young children, ASQ is currently the most widely used (Lindsay, 2008; Kerstjens et al, 2009). It is designed to fit in with early childhood routines to give a realistic overview of a child's functional communication skills.

In addition to the data on communication behaviours, we will analyse data from question D9 of the 18 month questionnaire which looks at communication skills (gestures). Data on both communication behaviours and skills will be used to identify any associations which may be present.

The outcome of this work will enable us to understand how early communication skills in children born with CP+/-L differ from non-cleft children and also between cleft types. Secondary analysis will enable us to determine what impact other confounding variables might have. The results of this proposed project will support future research into whether any observed differences in early communication skills are also associated with differences in outcomes, therefore justifying the need for early identification of children at risk of poor outcomes through monitoring of early communication skills.