

Guwahati, India: Jan. 30-Feb. 17

Nine-year-old Kiran, with her 9-month-old new lip and 2-month-old new palate now returns for a third time to follow-up with speech therapy, so we can begin to correct any learned habits and articulatory patterns that were impressed in her for her entire life until surgery this past year.

With the aid of a small dental mirror placed under her nose, she can see her nasal emission fogging the glass. With plastic tubing, she and her mother can “hear” unwanted air, and by touching the bony part of her nose, she can feel the vibrations of unwanted turbulence. She works so hard as we practice drills with her parents and develop a plan of care. She and her parents move their heads from side to side, the Indian way to acknowledge they understand, like a set of bobble heads.

The work is tedious using simple tools, but she enthusiastically giggles as she learns to see, hear, and feel the difference between a nasal N and a D or T, a nasal M or an oral B or P, then how to change a T sound into an S. At one success, she high-fives me and gets up to perform a celebratory dance. Her once broken smile, broken palate, broken speech transformed in nine months and she is now whole, her parents beam as she twirls and her smile a curve that seemed to set everything straight.

She is handed a referral sheet to see a teacher in her area in Nagaon who can help her with her exercises, and she shakes our hands, American style, and bows, hands in prayer position, “dhanyabad”... thank-you, and twirls once more as she skips along with her parents through the hospital halls, home to her village with a new life changed forever within the course of less than one year

So many stories, so little time. I have been so honored to have worked with such an amazing team and formed such a close camaraderie, particularly with wonderful translators. Namaskar, to all...

- Cathy Snyders, Clinical Coordinator, Medical Volunteer