

Success for Per Hall's Blue Peter appeal

(story courtesy of Addenbrooke's Hospital website) **1 June 2010**



Per Hall Consultant Plastic Surgeon

You have to do something special to earn a Blue Peter badge and there can be few greater achievements than giving children the ability to smile.

Addenbrooke's plastic surgeon Per Hall has just made his fourth appearance on the children's TV show thanks to his voluntary work with Operation Smile, a charity that provides free reconstructive surgery for children and young adults suffering from facial deformities, such as cleft lips and palates.

As Addenbrooke's clinical director of cleft lip and palate services, Per's team treats 80 to 90 new babies a year and have seen through 1,400 patients on a 20-year cycle of care. Clefts are the third most common birth defect and in the West cleft lips are usually repaired at three months and cleft palates at six. But in developing countries they often remain unrepaired, blighting children's lives by condemning them to social isolation, learning difficulties and even malnutrition.

Since the launch of Operation Smile in 1982, more than 120,000 children have had their clefts repaired by the charity's 5,000 medical volunteers. Last year Blue Peter made the charity the beneficiary of its annual appeal, and Phil McDonald, Operation Smile's medical director, suggested that viewers turn old T-shirts into gowns for cleft patients in Guwahati, north-east India. The appeal exceeded all expectations: as a result of viewers' generosity, 92,788 donated gowns will pay for 1,800 cleft operations.

Phil and Per were reunited on the Blue Peter set with eight-year-old Kiran, one of their patients. In December Per had returned to Guwahati to mend her palate, having tackled her cleft lip on the earlier trip. Blue Peter flew Kiran to England and she spent time with Phil's daughter in Chichester and also met the little boy who designed and donated the gown she wore for her operation.

Per has made three trips for Operation Smile in the past year – once to Ethiopia and twice to India. The training of local staff is a vital component of the charity's mission. "In Ethiopia, the University Hospital at Jimma has set aside land for a dedicated plastic surgery and burns unit. We need £1m. We've had architect's plans drawn up free through Build Aid and they already have the curriculum worked out," he says.

Although the Blue Peter appeal has now closed and no more gowns are being accepted, Operation Smile continues to rely on donations. For more information about the charity, visit its website: