

My name is Andrea Tompkins and I am a parent to three children. Jasmine is the eldest at 12 years of age, Cara is now 7 and Toby is about to start school at the age of 4.

I would like to share our experience of Addenbrooke's hospital and also pass on gratitude to the staff that cared for us when we required it.

I was 30 years old and 20 weeks pregnant with my second child when I was told from the results of a scan that my baby would be born with a cleft lip and palate. I had no knowledge at the time of what exactly this would mean. It was very daunting at first but the surgeon Mr Per Hall (the consultant plastic and reconstructive surgeon for the cleft team) the cleft nurse and speech therapist were all available to answer the questions that I had.

In May of 2001 Cara was born with a Cleft lip and Palate.

During my stay on the Sara ward, when Cara was just a few days old, Per Hall was kind enough to take time out of his social activities to visit Cara. He took a detour whilst taking his son to a cricket match, proving his dedication to his job.

In August 2001 at the tender age of 3 months. Cara had her first operation and her first stay on Ward D2 of Addenbrooke's. Mr Per Hall operated on Cara to close the hole in her lip.

Cara had her second operation conducted by Per Hall at nine months, this was to close the large hole in her palate. This procedure was very difficult as the hole was extremely large and was close to the front of the palate.

At 18 months Cara underwent the further surgery that was required on the same area of her palate. At all times the surgeons and teams were keen to go out of their way to explain procedure and reassure everyone involved.

The surgeons Mr Hall and Mr Ahmad also attend the CLAPA summer and Christmas parties. They are such good sports and are always included in some kind of focus on the day, whether it's a pie in the face or being arrested by storm troopers, they are both actively involved in pre and post care. They even agreed to be "knocked out" for the children to operate, a must see on the CLAPA party DVD.

I am forever grateful to all the team for making Cara's operations and recovery seem very achievable and for making our time in hospital as happy as it could be. I am now actively involved in CLAPA, it's my way of giving something back and also to help other parents in those stressful early months.



