Cleft Lip and Palate: a multidisciplinary team approach

The health-care burden of children with clefts and their families is high and the deformity has an impact on different aspects of their lives. There is consensus that children with clefts need comprehensive, coordinated care by an interdisciplinary team. The principal role of the cleft lip and palate team is to provide integrated care for children with clefts and to assure quality and continuity of patient care and longitudinal follow-up. The key factors to a successful treatment seem to be simple: a high case load per centre, a clear and simple treatment protocol followed over a long period of time, skilled and careful surgery avoiding scar tissue, well-trained and dedicated team members, independent outcome assessment, and active patient partnership.

In 2002, the World Health Organization already defined three priorities for improving the treatment of clefts and craniofacial anomalies: access and availability of care, identification of optimal clinical interventions for the clinical management (evidence-based care), and quality improvement in delivery of care.

So, where are we in 2017 in the quest for optimal care? Access and availability of care are still restricted and in 2016 60% of all cleft surgery in the world was still dependent on charity. Cleft teams that wish to select the best treatment protocol for their patients face a difficult task. The lack of well-designed studies means that treatment protocols are still largely based on clinical experience and unfounded prejudices. Anno 2017 the ideal treatment plan is still not there.

The orthodontist responsible for the care of children with cleft lip and palate must have an appreciation of the overall burden of care that children with clefts endure. These children undergo many surgical and orthodontic interventions when they grow up. Each intervention can have its own specific effect on subsequent maxillofacial growth. Surgical repair of the cleft deformity results in a facial growth pattern that differs from the non-cleft individual. Unfortunately, the benefits of treatment outweigh not always the adverse effects.

The aim of this course is to give a multidisciplinary overview of the cleft problem and of orthodontic treatment possibilities, limitations and difficulties in cleft lip and palate patients in order to provide the clinician with sufficient background information to treat these patients in his/her practice and to understand the outcome that can be obtained when treating these patients in collaboration with specialized CLP centres.