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Free Surgery in KwaZulu-Natal to Treat Children Suffering with Cleft Lips and Cleft Palates

Free Medical Evaluations Offered September 8th and 9th

Empangeni – A team of South African and international medical volunteers will provide free surgery to children and adults suffering with cleft lips and cleft palates from 7 to 16 September at Ngwelezane Hospital in Empangeni.

Medical evaluations will take place Friday, 8 September and Saturday, 9 September at Ngwelezane Hospital prior to a week of surgeries that will begin on Monday, 11 September.

Members of the communities who suffer with a facial disfigurement are encouraged to visit Ngwelezane Hospital on the 8th or 9th of September. For more information, call ***KZN Department of Health “Smile Mission” toll free line 0800 005 133.***

Cleft lips and cleft palates are the fourth largest birth defect in the world and make it difficult for children to eat and speak. A cleft lip is a hole in the lip that has caused the lip to not form fully and a cleft palate is a hole in the roof of the mouth. These two facial abnormalities are the fourth most common birth defect in the world, but for many children in poor areas of South Africa and around the world, medical treatment is not available. This is not true, medical treatment is available, but there may be waiting lists, please remove this.

These children may have difficulty eating; ear disease and dental problems occur frequently, as do problems with proper speech development. Often children suffering with cleft lips and cleft palates are hidden from society, living as outcasts even though their intelligence is not affected. But in as little as 45 minutes, one cleft lip surgery can change a child's life forever.

The inaugural “Smile Mission” will be in collaboration with Operation Smile, a private, not-for-profit, volunteer medical services organisation that provides free reconstructive facial surgery and related healthcare to children around the world

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and South Africa's Star Smile Fund, an organisation based in Gauteng that also provides reconstructive facial surgery to disadvantaged children. Operation Smile South Africa and Star Smile Fund are partnering with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health. The collaboration is the first of its kind, offering this service in South Africa's rural communities.

About Star Smile Fund

The Star Smile Fund was launched at the beginning of 2000 when the Lubner family took on the challenge as a request from Nelson Mandela to facilitate the surgery on a young girl with facial paralysis. Marc Lubner joined forces with The Star newspaper and Professor George Psaras, Head of the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the Johannesburg Hospital. An annual 'Smile Week' programme in October involves local and international doctors, who operate in support of on-going individual operations that occur throughout the year. Nelson Mandela is Chief Patron of the Star Smile Fund and has been closely involved with the Fund since its formation six years ago. Other distinguished patronage includes F W de Klerk, with partnership support provided by HRH Princess Caroline of Hanover. Now in its sixth year, the Star Smile Fund's objective is to reach South Africa's impoverished communities, informing them that there is assistance available in the field of corrective facial surgery.

For more information please contact: Jaqui Taljaard 083 400 3205

About Operation Smile South Africa

Operation Smile South Africa (OSSA) officially registered in March 2006, is part of a global alliance of Operation Smile Foundations and Chapters dedicated to providing free treatment to children and young adults suffering from cleft lips and cleft palates. OSSA's goal is to conduct medical missions in rural areas across the country and ultimately build the foundation into a regional hub for providing free treatment to children throughout Southern Africa who are suffering with facial deformities. Professor Anil Madaree, head of plastic and reconstructive surgery at the University of KwaZulu/Natal's Nelson R. Mandela's School of Medicine, serves as OSSA's Medical Director.

For more information, please contact Natalie Miller at 021 481 9132 or 076 293 6835.

About Operation Smile

Operation Smile is a private, not-for-profit, volunteer medical services organization providing free reconstructive facial surgery and related healthcare to children. Medical volunteers repair childhood facial deformities while building public and private partnerships that advocate for sustainable healthcare systems for children and families. Operation Smile has traveled to 32 developing countries over the last 24 years, partnering with local physicians and institutions in order to build a legacy of trust, hope, health and dignity for more than 100,000 patients hoping for a chance at a normal life.

For more information, visit www.operationsmile.org