Correcting facial deformity on a mentally impaired child can improve development

BY JIM LEONARDO

Parents of mentally handicapped children with craniofacial defects can find themselves faced with a gut-wrenching decision: Should they embark on reconstructive surgery on the child to correct the defect? Will the child truly benefit from the procedure, and is the benefit worth the pain for the child?

To help these parents through their decision-making process, a study published in PRS late last year concludes that craniofacial improvement benefits these children through increased social integration that, in turn, advances their learning processes.

Several pediatric plastic surgeons and two psychologists interviewed for this article also say these procedures should be considered reconstructive in nature and thus fully covered by medical insurance.

In addition, craniofacial correction in children without cognitive impairment shows promise in helping these young patients realize their full potential in society - and through it, learning processes - and also deserve full insurance coverage, the physicians agree.

The society's advocacy arm continues to battle for passage of the Treatment of Children's Deformities Act (TCDIA), federal legislation that would require coverage for correction of children's deformities and disfigurement. To date, the House bill, which was introduced by Rep. Sue Kelly (N.Y.), on March 1, 2005, has 28 cosponsors. The Senate bill, which was introduced by Sen. Norm Coleman (Minn.), on May 26, 2005, has 11 co-sponsors.

Functional vs. aesthetic

Steven Buchman, MD, director of the Craniofacial Anomalies Program and pediatric plastic surgery division at the University of Michigan's (Ann Arbor) C.S.

ASPS, microsurgeons draft guiding principles for facial transplantation

BY MIKE STOKES

With the impending likelihood that a face transplant will be performed in the United States and in anticipation of the media blitz that will inevitably follow, ASPS and the American Society for Reconstructive Microsurgery (ASRM) have issued guiding principles for this intriguing and controversial procedure. The document is designed to provide information on the medical risks and ethical considerations for face transplantation in a format that can be easily understood by a captivated general public and press.

"To balance the enthusiasm for life-changing new technology against the uncertainty and risk of tissue rejection, ASRM and ASPS collaborated to develop guiding principles that allow for scientific progress toward solving some of plastic surgery's most challenging cases without fully endorsing a technique with many unanswered questions," says ASPS President Bruce Cunningham, MD.

The statement updates and refines a more technical version of a position paper crafted in 2005 by an ASRM face transplant task force led by Robert Walton, MD, Chicago, who is also a past president of the organization.

"Considering the fact that there were a number of groups in the United States and abroad that were contemplating going forward with facial transplantation in 2006, the ASRM felt that as a national society representing the interests of plastic surgeons, there should be some common ground that we would come forward with to define acceptable standards of engagement of this new technology," says Dr. Walton.

When a French surgical team led by Bernard Devauchelle, MD, and Jean-Michel Dubernard, MD, generated worldwide
Reconstructive summit charts course for new waters

BY JIM LEONARDO

The annual summit meeting of three reconstructive surgery societies held Jan. 11-17 in Tucson, Ariz., brought together hundreds of surgeons for educational courses, workshops, lectures and social events, with attention focused on several topics including facial transplantation. The American Association for Hand Surgery, American Society for Peripheral Nerve and American Reconstructive Microsurgery annual meetings at the Canyon Resort in Tucson, Jan. 14 for collaborative sessions of a combined program.

The organizations also officers:
AAHS President: Robert Bass,
President-elect: Brian Kline

Obagi awards research grant to ASPS

A new opportunity to test therapies for wound healing and patient outcomes has been made available through an unrestricted research grant provided to ASPS from Obagi Medical Products, Inc.

The grant will fund research to investigate whether Obagi’s Nu-Derm System has an impact on the recovery period and wound healing in post-ablative procedures. Possible research may look at whether the Obagi system results in shorter healing rates, less visible scarring and reduced adverse events related to ablative surgical procedures.

“Obagi’s Nu-Derm System provides a new and innovative avenue for the study of skin health and wound healing,” says PSEF President Brian Kinney, MD. “We anticipate the findings will validate anecdotal evidence that the product can reduce side effects such as redness and darkening of the skin, and enhance long-term cosmetic results.”

The significance of the study is underscored by an estimated 9.2 million procedures performed by plastic surgeons in 2004 (the last year for statistics are available). All of that work was made possible through the support of the ASPS.

Face the truth

ASPN President: Rajiv Midha, MD,
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
President-elect: Gregory Evans, MD,
Orange, Calif.
ASPM President: Lawrence Cooper, MD,
Durham, N.C.
President-elect: L. Scott Levin, MD,
Norfolk, Va.

Obagi awarded research grant to ASPS to support studies on wound healing and patient outcomes. Obagi is excited about the potential impact of this research on the field of plastic surgery.

Dr. Kinney says the society is in the process of developing an aggressive study timeline. He says that Obagi will have no direct influence in the research design, selection of study sites or subjects, or influence over the study’s outcome. Dr. Kinney adds that study findings will be reported completely and accurately regardless of whether the findings reflect favorably or unfavorably on the Obagi system.

A project report will be released at Plastic Surgery 2006 in San Francisco.

Susan Kasowski, MD, San Diego, Calif., will serve as the chair of a task force charged with designing and executing a process to support the initiative. Task force members include Gregory Evans, MD, Orange, Calif.; Neil Fine, MD, Chicago; Andrea Pusic, MD, New York; Robert Walton, MD, Chicago; and Edwin Wilkins, MD, Ann Arbor, Mich.

In all, Dr. Kinney is enthusiastic about the opportunity to conduct such research with an unrestricted grant. “We believe this is an excellent opportunity for the society and Obagi to support — together — important research protocols that will serve our patients and our members.”

Long Beach, Calif.-based Obagi is a specialty pharmaceutical company that develops and commercializes innovative skin health products for plastic surgery, dermatology and related aesthetic and therapeutic markets. For information, visit Obagi’s Web site at www.obagi.com.

Dr. Haack

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have to be so carefully planned is a fine piece of work and the most thorough post-

petition paper on the subject you will ever find.

But will a joint statement make all sur-
guons around the world stop and think twice? Hopefully. Will it make the next

transplant less likely to be subjected to a

press up roar? Unlikely. One cannot expect

complete compliance with these guidelines

without some exception to sensation-

alism. No matter how long this next

attempt is kept under the hat, the pressure

to let the press in on the secret will be enor-
mous. The media, with its penchant for

make the story about more than just a

supreme surgical triumph.

We, as a collective group of highly

skilled surgeons, should not loathe the next

face transplant attempt, especially since it’s

likely to occur sooner rather than later in

the United States. Instead we should expect

that it will not be some abrupt undertaking,

hugos and cahill attempt at fame, but

instead will be a remarkable tour de force,

thoroughly prepared for and finely carried

out by a surgical juggernaut, a team that

has done the best job it can to avoid mis-
takes.

Will this next opus be any less sensa-

tional? Stay tuned.