

Changing a Baby's Life

A couple of years ago, a couple called me and asked if I could help them. They had a little 3 month old baby, born with cleft palate and cleft lip. The baby was born in Mexico, but they had just moved to Kansas. They had heard about a similar case where I had been able to help a little boy get the surgery done to fix a cleft palate and the family was very happy with the results. This couple did work on a farm in Kansas, so I was able to register them in KSFHP for basic medical services. The baby was very healthy otherwise, so it was okay to wait for surgery until we got all the paperwork filled out and approved. I helped them fill out an application for Special Health Services.

In the meantime, the mother took her baby to the local WIC office one day to apply for WIC services and they called me, very concerned about the child. They had asked the mother whether the baby had had any care yet for the cleft lip and palate. With her limited English she had not been able to explain to them what was being done. She had handed them one of my business cards and they recognized my name and called me. I was able to explain to them what had been done already and that we were basically waiting to be approved for surgery. They also confirmed that the baby seemed very healthy otherwise. By the time the child was approved and surgery had been scheduled, the baby was close to 5 months old. The surgery to correct the cleft lip is usually done first and can be done as soon as the child weighs 10 lbs. Then the surgery to correct the cleft palate is done after the child has healed from the first surgery.

The baby had the surgery to fix the cleft lip and did very well. The parents were very happy with how the surgery turned out and told me their baby looked better than they had expected. The baby continued to do very well, so much so, that the doctor told us he would be happy to do the cleft palate surgery a little earlier than he usually would. He usually waited until they were a year old, but, due to the excellent physical health and the fact that the baby was a little big for its age, they ended up doing the surgery at 11 months old. The baby also came through that with flying colors and the parents were very happy with that as well. The child will have to have another oral surgery done when at about 13 years old as even the gum line was split down the middle. The doctor explained to us that if they fix it sooner, there is an added risk that the jawbone will stop growing at that point and could stay abnormally small long term. Also, this would give time to get all the permanent teeth in and they can go in surgically and straighten them out somewhat and possibly fit the child with braces at that point.

This is something one would never wish on any parents but they maintained a really positive attitude throughout this whole thing and were so very thankful for the help they received. I was very thankful for a program that could help with the financial aspects as well as for the very nice, kind doctors and nurses we encountered. I felt very blessed to have been a part of this whole experience.

