

Innovations in research with children born with cleft palate

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Background

1 in 700 children is born with a cleft palate, 50% of whom have speech problems which persist beyond age 5. The findings of large cohort studies have led to substantial changes to clinical services in some countries, resulting in improved outcomes in many relevant domains. Nevertheless, children born with cleft palate still need speech and language therapy services and research investigating speech development and production is essential to drive the next wave of clinical developments.

Purpose

The aim of this panel is to highlight current research in the field of speech development, disorder and intervention in children born with cleft palate. Five studies are presented: two investigated predictors for speech outcomes in children born with cleft palate; one introduces a novel approach to measuring milestones in babbling; one reports on a trial of parent-led therapist-supervised intervention; and one describes a longitudinal cohort study.

Method

Two of the studies are using cohort study designs, two report randomised controlled trials and one uses data from a clinical audit. Three of the studies involve longitudinal data collection.

Results

Taken together, the papers show that variation in speech outcomes have been identified and associated with differences in both surgical and speech and language therapy intervention. Longitudinal study data collection is ongoing but preliminary findings provide support for analysing babble in one-year-olds as a predictor for later outcomes.

Conclusions

Research from trials and longitudinal studies in speech development, disorder and intervention for children born with cleft palate is leading to findings which inform our understanding and clinical practice. Further research is possible within a new and growing national cohort study of children born with clefts which provides opportunities for nested studies using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies within an existing and well documented sample.

SPEAKERS ON THE PANEL AND THEIR AFFILIATION

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