

Operation Smile.....and How Media has Played a Role Creating Awareness and Promoting this Medical Organisation

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Introduction

Operation Smile is an international humanitarian medical charity, which provides services to children and adults of all faiths. Operation Smile was founded in 1982 by Dr Bill Magee and his wife Kathleen Magee. It is non-profit and non-governmental organisation based in Virginia. It involves corrective surgery of cleft lip and palate to developing countries. The organisation assists the host country in managing and coordinating the surgical programs, educating the people of the country medical training, as well as contributing medical equipment and supplies. Operation Smile grows medical self-sufficiency in resource poor environments and is involved in scientific research. Through the organisations scientific research it gives them a better understanding of the incidence of cleft lip and palate with the aim of reducing the occurrence. They also recruit a multinational and multi-disciplinary team of volunteers who come from a variety of backgrounds and personal beliefs. They include plastic surgeons, anaesthetists, paediatric intensivists, post and pre op nurses, dentists, speech therapists and a host non-medical support staff. It's a project that brings about various areas of healthcare with the aim of improving the quality of services in areas less privileged. Operation Smile also involves students who help assist in education and promote the services of the organisation when they are in the country. This is truly a well-coordinated service that is provided by individuals who are committed to the upliftment of healthcare and well-being of those with severe resource constraints.

Background

Operation Smile has partnered with over 80 countries to help adults and children across the globe born with cleft lips and palates receive surgery to correct their facial deformity. This organisation is well recognised by virtue of the work carried out and has gained popularity via the media. Cleft lip and palates is a facial and oral malformation that occurs in utero. It is as a result of a lack of tissue in the region of the lips and the mouth. The remaining available tissue does not properly close resulting in a cleft. Cleft lip and cleft palate can occur unilateral or bilateral. Because the lips and palates develop separately it is possible to have a cleft palate and without a cleft lip and vice versa. Or they can occur together. Many scientists believe that cleft lips and palates are a result of genetic disposition. Or it may be a combination of environmental and geographical factors. It could be also be drug induced e.g. Anticonvulsant and anti-acne medication that is teratogenic. Some chemicals and viruses can result in birth defects well. It was also found that deficiency in folic acid during pregnancy can lead to birth defects. There are numerous problems associated with cleft lip and palate like speech impairment, recurrent ear infection, hearing loss, eating problems as well as dental problems and malocclusions.

It is through the media like social networks, television, internet, radio and newspaper that operation smile promotes there organisation. Media plays a vital role in ensuring that the public are well informed about the charitable and humanitarian work they do. Operation Smile relies on fundraising, donations, sponsors and charity drives to assist in

making it possible to provide surgeries to millions of underprivileged children. Education is done by publishing facts about the condition and where to seek treatment and to dispel misunderstandings, fears or superstitions. Whenever operation smile is in a country they rely on media for patient recruitment in neighbouring and rural areas to seek help. Media also helps op smile locate previously operated patients for follow up visits.

During mission's media in the form of international and local magazines, newspapers and news channels are always invited to capture the moments that make history and the hard work it entails. Sponsors are also invited to see what goes on behind the scenes after all they make it possible to carry out such remarkable work. This is an excellent way to market one self and encourage more sponsors and people to volunteer.

Operation Smile also uses advertising to enlist the help of volunteers into their programs. You tube had posted several short video clips of Operation Smile depicting the work they do, interviews with volunteers and raises awareness of the condition. This also acts educates the people with regards to the condition itself and the plight of the less fortunate.

The media may help raise awareness and educate people about the condition and the core function of operation smile. But let there be one mistake made the media is right there to report and can also tarnish a good reputation. Back in 1999 a 2 year old girl who was part of Operation Smile program died during surgery due to complications. The media had a field day with brining an element of negativity on the part of Operation Smile. While the media plays a role in promoting this organisation some events may be reported in a negative light by the media. It's always important that the media report the true facts of a particular story. Like many things in life there are always two sides to a particular story.

Conclusion

Operation Smile is truly an organization for the people by the people. A group of dedicated healthcare professionals from all walks of life whose aim is to selflessly give back to those who desperately need the help and assistance. The media plays a vital role to uplift such an organisation whereby more and more assistance in terms of voluntary help and finance can be gained to enable such an organisation to thrive.

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