

CoRSU Nutritionist visits Spires Cleft Centre, Oxford, April 2018.

Report by Jane Sibley, Cleft Nurse Specialist, Spires Cleft Centre, Oxford.

As many of you will know, I first met Bertha when I visited CoRSU just over 2 years ago in March 2016. During this visit, we struck up a friendship whilst sharing our very different experiences about feeding infants with cleft lip and palate. I was privileged to be able to share my in-depth knowledge on this subject with Bertha who was equally keen to learn from my experience. During this visit, we introduced soft bottles and teats for the nutrition team to use at CoRSU following Bertha's request. I don't mind admitting that I was a little nervous about this, mainly because I was worried about increased gastrointestinal infection rates (from the practicalities of being able to clean them between feeds) and also that they were used correctly. However, after my first week there, and seeing many infants with clefts as inpatients and outpatients together, Bertha and the team seemed to understand the theory behind them and the indications for using them.

Over the last 2 years we have been keeping in touch regularly to discuss individual cases and success stories via email and WhatsApp phone calls. I was very keen to be able to meet up with Bertha again and so I was over the moon when Interface Uganda agreed to fund Bertha to visit the Spires Cleft Centre in Oxford to enable me to carry on my teaching with Bertha. It only became 'real' once Bertha's Visa was granted and after she had to have several immunisations in order to get her Observer Contract from Oxford University Hospitals. These vital 'pieces of paper' were successfully gained largely due to Bertha's tenacity and Interface Uganda's support.

As you will see Bertha has written a very thorough report of her time she spent in Oxford which needs little adding to it by me!

After a day or so, we had identified 2 specific areas that Bertha wanted to concentrate on which were (1) **conducting feeding assessments** on infants before starting them on the soft bottles with particular attention to respiratory assessment and suck, swallow, breath co-ordination and (2) **recognising the clinical signs of and treating infant reflux**- both conservatively and using different types of medication.

After reading Bertha's report, I am overwhelmed with the amount she has learnt during the week and feel proud of her that she is confident to take this newly acquired knowledge back to CoRSU in order to suggest appropriate changes to improve the feeding experience of infants with cleft lip and palate.

As you will also notice from the photographs, Bertha not only went home with new knowledge but also very heavy suitcases!

I'd like to say a huge thank you to Rebecca Cook for collecting so many breastpumps for Bertha and her team at CoRSU. The breastpumps are proving invaluable for the inpatient's mothers and those attending clinics to increase their breast milk supply. She managed to take them all back!

I'd also like to thank Interface Uganda for their continued support in funding the supply of soft bottles and teats which are making a massive difference to the lives of the families who have a baby with a cleft that are treated at CoRSU. Not only do they improve the weight gain for the babies, meaning they can have their surgery earlier and make a fast recovery afterwards, they also make the mothers feel 'normal' in the fact that they can use a bottle instead of struggling along as best they can with the challenging and problematic alternatives. We sent Bertha home with 50 soft bottles and 50 packs of teats to top up her supplies in order to make use of the colossal baggage allowance on Kenya Airways!

It really is an enormous privilege to have the opportunity to work with Bertha, Andrew and Sarah and the rest of the cleft team team at CoRSU. Thank you so much to Sarah (as Medical Director at CoRSU) for encouraging Bertha to visit us at Spires and allowing her time off from her work at CoRSU to do so. I will look forward to my next visit to CoRSU in the, hopefully, not too distant future!