



American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (ABOMS) Surgeons Share Stories and Insights for National Cleft and Craniofacial Awareness and Prevention Month

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Chicago, Illinois?The American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (ABOMS) is proud to recognize National Cleft and Craniofacial Awareness and Prevention Month this July. This month is dedicated to raising awareness about cleft and craniofacial anomalies and promoting prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment. ABOMS remains committed to advancing care for individuals with these conditions by supporting the dedicated surgeons who transform lives through their work. In addition to running a stringent Board Certification process, the organization also offers a Certificate of Added Qualifications (CAQ) in Pediatric Craniomaxillofacial Surgery (Cleft and Craniofacial) to help families find cleft and craniofacial specialists with focused expertise in this area of oral and maxillofacial surgery.

Cleft and craniofacial anomalies affect thousands of children and adults in the United States each year. These conditions can present significant challenges, including difficulties with feeding, speech, and hearing, as well as emotional and social impacts. Treatment typically involves a long-term collaboration between not

just an oral and maxillofacial surgeon and the patient, but also other medical specialists like orthodontists, speech therapists, and psychologists.

“From my experience, all of the children I care for are just like other kids, growing and navigating life. The biggest difference for these children is that they endure many surgeries early in life and there can be fatigue in that. Additionally, these children can experience anxiety regarding their facial difference, and at worst, bullying,” explained Rachel A. Bishop, DDS, MD, FACS, an ABOMS Diplomate. “Education is key in providing information so the public has a better understanding of these unique conditions, the struggles the families face, and the impact these conditions have on the patient.”

ABOMS Diplomate David Wilson, DMD, MD, FACS explained that patients treated for cleft and craniofacial anomalies, along with their families, often demonstrate incredible resilience and strength. He finds being part of their journeys both inspiring and heartwarming.

“This specific area of oral and maxillofacial surgery allows us as subspecialists to treat a patient from birth to adulthood,” commented Dr. Wilson. “I enjoy becoming part of the ‘family’ and making a positive impact for young children and their families. It is more than a surgery—it’s wishing them a happy birthday, playing games with them at annual cleft picnics, and spending as much time as possible to make sure they know my interest is helping their child develop and have all the opportunities any other child has growing up.”

There are many misconceptions about cleft and craniofacial conditions. Cleft and craniofacial conditions can affect more than appearance; effects on breathing, eating, and speaking may also develop, thus requiring long-term care from many specialists. ABOMS Diplomate Nicholas Mechas, DMD added that it’s important for the public to understand that cleft and craniofacial anomalies do not indicate cognitive disabilities.

“Cleft and craniofacial anomalies, although very visible, frequently occur in patients without any neurological or cognitive sequelae. Many patients with these conditions are mistakenly believed to have other impairments when nothing could be further from the truth. Many cleft and craniofacial afflicted patients serve as a model for persistence, kindness, humility, and maturity.”

For surgeons considering a specialization in cleft and craniofacial surgery, the field offers both challenges and profound rewards. The opportunity to make a significant difference in patients’ lives is unparalleled, while also providing a fulfilling career of lifelong growth.

“I grew enamored with the life-changing aspect these surgeries can provide. The challenge of minimizing the amount of procedures, the correct timing of the interventions, and the patient-specific tailoring of each surgery, presents a unique opportunity for lifelong learning and quality improvement,” commented Dr. Mechas.

Dr. Bishop elaborated on the impact this career can have on a surgeon: "These experiences have provided me with a sense of purpose, knowing that I am able to provide meaningful change in the life of a child. Although there is a unique emotional stress that comes with treating children due to parental anxieties and expectations of an excellent outcome, the rewards significantly outweigh the stress. It is one of the many reasons that this profession is so unique—sharing a bond with a family and working to instill trust and confidence from day one through honest communication and interaction. Through the strength, resilience and courage of my patients and their families, I am continually inspired to be a better surgeon."

For more information about National Cleft and Craniofacial Awareness and Prevention Month and to read real patient stories, visit <https://www.aboms.org/>.

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American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

Overseen by an eight-member Board of Directors, the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (ABOMS) is the certifying board for the specialty of oral and maxillofacial surgery in the United States.

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