

Zandile ready to face future

Skilled surgeons give young girl new appearance – and end years of torment

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A TEAM of surgeons took less than two hours yesterday to give a 12-year-old girl with a rare facial deformity a new nose – ending more than a decade of taunts and trauma for the child.

The difficult surgery was done by East London reconstructive surgeon Dr Andre Keppler and the head of the plastic surgery department at Port Elizabeth's Provincial Hospital, Dr Chris van der Walt.

The surgery on Zandile Malima was part of the Smile Foundation's Smile Week held annually at Provincial Hospital. Keppler and Van der Walt also consulted with veteran plastic surgeons in Port Elizabeth, Dr Charles Apostolis and Dr Donald Solomons, about Zandile's case.

Yesterday morning shortly before her surgery, Zandile – from Hopefield, between Hogsback and Alice in the Eastern Cape – said she could not wait to see her new nose.

"I was born like this. I am very happy about the operation. My family and my friends at school are celebrating with me."

Her mother, Nolovo Malima, 45, said Zandile always looked out for others. "If I am worried about something she will ask what is wrong. She is always very concerned about the welfare of others. If I go away she will clean the house so it is spotless when I return.

"At school it is sometimes difficult. They tease her. She comes home crying. She will refuse to go back. The teachers are trying to explain the situation to the children. Our community has been very understanding about the operation.

"I am so very happy about it. My whole family is excited. When we left for Port Elizabeth they held a prayer service wishing her good health and a speedy return."

Malima said the family was very poor. She occasionally cooked for a nearby creche and could not afford to take Zandile to a doctor.

"The last time she saw a doctor was when she was born. The doc-

tors said she was fine. We did not have money to seek treatment for her," she said. "The closest doctor is a R15 taxi fare away."

Vicky Riley, who works for a UK charity that assists schools between Alice and Hogsback, said she first encountered Zandile while helping out at her school.

"She was getting tormented at school. We decided to help her. I took her to see Dr Keppler. We wanted to ask him how much it would cost as we intended to raise funds in the UK. Dr Keppler said he would speak to the Smile Foundation."

Riley said she was overjoyed when the phone call came last week to say Zandile could have her operation this week.

She brought some new pyjamas for Zandile to the hospital. The little girl got very excited about the blue slippers and a toy sheep that she promptly named Lucky.

"I love animals like dogs," Zandile said. "I also really like to sing."

Keppler said he had a particular interest in cleft lip and palate surgery and assisted regularly with Smile Weeks.

"Zandile has a facial cleft that is very, very rare. This surgery was a difficult one for us. She has a midline facial cleft. Her face bones fused later than normal and left a defect in the bone. This made her nose very broad and splayed the nose a bit open.

"We mainly tried to address the look of the soft tissue. We removed thin, abnormal skin and used soft tissue from the outer part of the nose to build up her nose and give her a bit of a nose bridge."

Keppler said he saw Zandile's twin sister, Ziyanda, at the initial consultation. "She acted as a template for us ... we knew we would not be able to achieve the same [but] it gave us a good idea of what their parents wanted for Zandile. We knew we would be able to help her look much better than [before]."

He said they were overjoyed at the surgery results. "I am more than happy with the outcome."

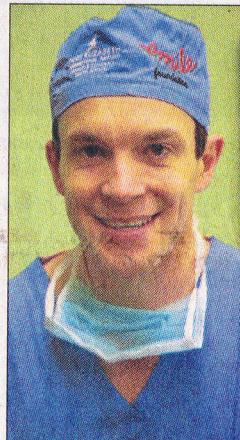


BEFORE SURGERY: Zandile Malima, 12, with her toy sheep called Lucky and mom Nolovo Malima waiting for her surgery at Provincial Hospital yesterday



NEW LOOK: Zandile's perfect little nose after surgery

Pictures: EUGENE COETZEE



MAKING IT HAPPEN: Doctor Andre Keppler