

EC Health MEC welcomes the much needed surgeries -11 September 2023

Eastern Cape MEC for Health, Nomakhosazana Meth has welcomed the return of the Vodacom Foundation Smile Week, saying at least 30 youths in Nelson Mandela Bay, will have their lives changed for the better.

The Smile Week will return to Port Elizabeth Provincial Hospital this week.

MEC Meth said the department was proud to be associated with the foundation that is a champion for the needy.

“We strongly believe in partnerships and collaborations, and the foundation has been one of our most reliable partners over a number of years.

“We welcome all the doctors who have dedicated their time and skills to changing the lives of the young people who will benefit from this great partnership,” she said.

This comes after the Smile Foundation, Smile Week got into full swing in Gqeberha on Monday. The full working week, during which surgeons, their surgical teams, and other medical professionals come together to perform reconstructive surgery on children, whose families would not otherwise be able to afford it. The operations commence from the 11th to the 15th of September.

The Smile Week is sponsored by Vodacom Foundation in collaboration with Smile Foundation and the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Department of PE Provincial Hospital in Gqeberha.

“Smile Foundation extends its heartfelt gratitude to the Vodacom Foundation for their generous backing of this Smile Week. It is through the support of committed donors like them that we can extend our assistance to so many children in need.

“We also wish to convey our profound appreciation to the devoted surgeons, medical experts, and support personnel at PE Provincial Hospital, who are generously dedicating their time to provide these children with the life-altering surgeries they require,” said Marc Lubner, the co-founder & Executive Chairman of Smile Foundation.

This Smile Week commences on 11th September 2023, during which 30 children will undergo life-changing surgery. Among these brave young patients is 15-year-old Richard Visagie.

There are times when, without any forewarning, a person's life can be altered in an instant. This was certainly the case when tragedy struck Richard Visagie when he experienced electrical burns while playing with a kite. These burns impacted 30% of his body, including his hands, scalp (resulting in hair loss), and upper body.

Since that fateful day in July 2020, Richard has undergone an astounding six surgeries to address the consequences of the electrical burns. The hair on his head, as well as the skin on his right hand, face, and chest, leaving behind painful scars.

The impact on his life has been profound. No longer able to participate in his beloved sport of rugby, he sometimes endures teasing at school for wearing a cap to conceal the scars.

Dr NAME van der Walt and his dedicated medical team have been tirelessly working to alleviate his suffering. They have undertaken the challenging task of debriding a sizable portion of scalp tissue and conducting a skin graft in the affected area.

Initially, a rotation flap was employed to cover the exposed bone, followed by a secondary skin grafting procedure.

Now, the focus shifts to the tissue expander, a critical step in Richard's quest for a brighter future. The plan is to take a portion of his healthy skin and carefully insert the tissue expander beneath it.

This innovative approach aims to expand the surrounding healthy tissue, allowing for the eventual excision of the skin-grafted area. Once the healthy scalp tissue is utilized to close the wound, Richard will once again enjoy a scalp with the potential for hair growth.

Richard's story is a testament to his strength and resilience, and we are committed to standing by him every step of the way on his path to recovery and renewal.

“At Smile Foundation, we believe that deep empathy and an unconditional love for others is what enables us to change destinies.

“Being able to give a child a secure sense of self – something that every child so deserves – is what drives all of our Smile Weeks and motivates us daily,” concludes Marc Lubner.

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