

Safety and Quality Assurance

Interplast believes that patients all over the world, from all backgrounds, deserve the same standard of care and safety that patients receive here in the United States. To ensure that our patients receive the safest and highest quality medical care—even in the compromised conditions developing countries often face—Interplast has developed rigorous quality assurance policies and protocols.

Challenges in the Developing World

Surgery by its very nature is a high-risk proposition. Because Interplast medical volunteers and outreach center doctors perform surgical procedures in the developing world under a variety of geographical, environmental, physical and professional circumstances, there is a higher risk of complications.

Interplast works in some of the poorest countries in the world, and among the poorest members of those countries' populations. Its patients often lack basic medical care and may suffer from malnutrition or other ailments prior to surgery. Many families travel long distances over trying conditions to reach an Interplast team, sometimes compromising their health even further. In addition, Interplast patients frequently have no medical history to refer to or rely upon. Requesting and receiving medical information from parents, sometimes translating through several languages, is a less-than-perfect process. Sometimes, in a desperate opportunity to secure surgery for their children, parents may not be completely truthful in answering health-related questions.

The facilities in which Interplast works meet minimum standards for safety, but are not as advanced as those in the United States. Power outages are also possible at many Interplast sites. Following surgery, ward care can present other challenges, such as skilled nursing shortages.

Overcoming Challenges to Provide the Highest-Quality Care

Interplast strives to provide its patients with high-quality medical care through the efforts and talents of its medical volunteers and outreach center staff. In the last seven years, a concerted effort has been made to systematically improve safety and quality of care, despite the challenges listed above. This quality improvement (QI) program is overseen by Interplast's chief medical officer (a plastic surgeon), its chief anesthesiologist and its quality improvement committee, comprised of medical experts from around the country. Some of the QI tools used by Interplast follow.

- Interplast's **Medical Policy Manual**, distilling all Interplast medical safety policies and protocols, is reviewed and followed on every trip. These manuals contain clinical competency protocols, such as "Rules of 10" for each medical practice (surgery, nursing, anesthesia and pediatrics) and many other safety procedures.
- All team members conduct safety drills—or "run scenarios"—prior to the first surgical case. This helps **optimize readiness in the event of emergency**, such as a power outage, oxygen supply failure, significant blood loss, airway obstruction or fire.
- Interplast pediatricians, anesthesiologists and surgeons **evaluate and screen all patients** before surgery. They perform a complete medical workup of each patient, adhering to strict blood count and weight requirements before approving a child for surgery. Medical evaluations have stringent requirements, and medical team members have the ability to reject a child for the surgery schedule.
- Great efforts are taken, using translators and pictograms, to **educate parents** to the dangers of performing surgery on children with respiratory complications, and for those who have eaten prior to surgery. Those instructions are repeated and emphasized continually during the team trip.
- Interplast teams **prescreen the abilities of the local nursing staff** and **make late-night rounds** with translators. Interplast also establishes lines of communication and rents cell phones so that the local **nursing staff can immediately reach team members**

if there should be a problem. For this reason, Interplast teams stay in hotels closest to the hospital. If a patient has a problem that concerns team members at the end of a surgical day, two volunteers stay at the hospital overnight with the patient.

- Interplast uses personal data assistants (PDAs) donated by Palm to **record patient chart information** on medical volunteer team trips. With this system, Interplast collects patient medical information to track the effectiveness of its quality improvement initiatives and to secure statistical data, assisting in studies of medical information relevant to Interplast and other organizations in the future.
- Year-round Interplast surgical outreach centers – in Nepal, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Peru, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and Zambia – also use high-tech solutions and innovative web-based technologies to ensure patient safety and capture data about our cleft and burn patients. Using digital photographs and web-based data entry forms, **cases performed abroad by Interplast outreach centers are systematically reviewed by expert surgeons in the United States, Canada and around the world** in order to ensure medical safety and quality.
- After each surgical team trip, all team members complete **detailed trip reports** about the patients screened and treated. These reports are reviewed by management and seven medical specialty committees, including a Quality Improvement Committee, in order to establish Interplast medical policies and report to the Board of Directors.
- Reportable serious medical incidents rarely occur on Interplast trips, but they do happen. In order for Interplast to properly evaluate these incidents, team members involved in a serious medical incident (a possible permanent sequelae or death), as well as team leadership, document the incident as soon as it happens using Interplast's **Quality Improvement (QI) Workbook**, ensuring uniform reporting. The goal is to ascertain the factors involved in each incident and thereby **learn from mistakes and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future**. Once the incident is documented, it is reviewed by team members on site, as well as by the quality improvement committee and chief medical officer in the United States.
- Interplast's **emphasis on education and training** also improves the quality of care at the sites in which it works. Interplast provides lectures and hands-on training on surgical team trips, as well as supporting advanced training of its outreach surgeons and conducting visiting educator workshops throughout the year. Safety protocols and policies are always a key component of every training opportunity.

For more information about Interplast's quality improvement program, please contact Dr. Scott Corlew, chief medical officer, at scott@interplast.org.

Interplast—the first humanitarian organization to provide free reconstructive surgery for children with clefts, disabling burns and hand injuries—has provided 64,000 life-changing surgeries for those who have no other access to care. Working in underserved regions of 16 countries throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America, Interplast teaches, empowers and partners with volunteers and overseas medical professionals so every child living in poverty has free access to the safest and highest-quality care—now and in the future. Interplast is committed to transforming as many lives as possible, allocating 90 percent of its budget to medical programs.