

## Cleft Surgery Workforce in Bolivia

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**Introduction.** The significant contribution of orofacial clefts to DALYs can be averted with timely interventions by cleft surgeons. Cleft lip and/or palate (CLP) prevalence varies between 1-in-1000 live births in high-income countries and 1-in-730 in low- and middle-income countries. The highest reported prevalence of cleft disease worldwide is in Bolivia, up to 1-in-373 in certain regions. The burden of cleft disease is amplified by the fact that there are only 120 plastic surgeons and 10 cleft specialists that practice in Bolivia, all internationally trained due to the lack of a Bolivian program.

**Aim:** To elucidate the current cleft surgeon workforce in Bolivia and identify future candidates for cleft surgery training.

**Methods:** An electronic survey was distributed to 88 accredited plastic surgeon members of the Bolivian Society of Plastic Surgeons (BSPS). Investigated variables included: ability to perform cleft surgery, past training, cleft surgical volume, and interest in additional cleft surgery training.

**Results:** Eighty-three surgeons responded (94% response rate). The most frequently reported countries for residency training were Argentina (39.2%), Brazil (31.6%), and Mexico (20.2%). 29 (35.8%) surgeons reported practicing cleft surgery, of which 2 reported performing over 50 cleft lip/palate surgeries annually. The majority (51.7%) of cleft surgeons reported doing at least some cleft work in mission-based settings. No significant association between cleft and non-cleft surgeon exposure to cleft surgery during training ( $p=0.292$ ) and between the proportion of cleft and non-cleft surgeons that were interested in further cleft training ( $p=0.196$ ).

**Conclusions:** We found a board-certified plastic surgery cleft workforce of about 0.24 per 100,000 inhabitants in Bolivia. Although surgeons must go abroad for training, the majority reported adequate exposure to cleft care during this time. Both cleft and non-cleft surgeons are interested in further training, suggesting awareness of the cleft backlog currently faced by Bolivia.