

CSI Team at Jacobi Medical Center Helps Afghan Girl Smile Again

Multidisciplinary team performs 9 hour reconstructive surgery to restore facial movement.



Pictured (l-r): Dr. Jody Kaban; Dr. Michelle Kennedy; Dr. Arian Sedeghi, Melissa Shapiro and patient Wahida Sher-Agha; Dr. Arthur Adamo; Dr. Benn Lieberman, and Dr. Daniel Buchbinder.

As a result of a childhood fall from a bridge in her native Kabul, Afghanistan, 16-year-old Wahida Sher-Agha has spent half of her life unable to smile, laugh or eat solid foods without pain. With the bones in her jaw nearly welded shut and after attempts by Afghani doctors to correct the condition proved unsuccessful, Wahida was left with little hope for the future.

After being found on a visit to Afghanistan by the humanitarian agency Healing the Children, hope was restored when the doctors from the Jacobi Medical Center CSI (Craniofacial Surgical Institute) accepted the case. The CSI team represents a unique, multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of all types of serious head and neck diseases or conditions. These include traumatic injuries from assaults, vehicular accidents and pathological conditions involving benign and malignant tumors, and congenital problems such as facial deformities or cleft palate. Specialists from Plastic Surgery, ENT, Oral Surgery, Neurosurgery, Ophthalmology, General Surgery and Anesthesiology are all part of the CSI team.

Wahida was treated by Oral Surgeons Arthur Adamo, DDS; Daniel Buchbinder, DMD, MD; and Benn Lieberman, DMD; Thoracic Surgeon Jody Kaban, MD; and Anesthesiologist Aurimas Knepa, MD, a specialist in fiber optic intubation.

Prior to the surgery, the entire CSI team met to evaluate Wahida's case and develop a treatment plan. "It was important that we corrected Wahida's injury as soon as possible," said Dr. Adamo. "In situations like this, where a patient can't open their mouth, it can be very dangerous if they have a seizure or even vomit, and it is nearly impossible for them to receive any dental treatment."

The delicate procedure, performed on February 26, lasted nine hours and required the removal of two centimeters of bone and a graft from Wahida's rib cage. The CSI team was able to achieve their goal of opening Wahida's mouth from 8 millimeters to a normal 41 millimeters. "I'm extremely proud of how well our team worked together," said Dr. Adamo. "Wahida will finally be able to function and chew normally."

The operation was paid for by a generous donation from the Ray Tye Medical Aid Foundation, with help from the Jacobi Medical Center Auxiliary, Inc.

Dana Buffin, Northeast Executive Director of Healing the Children, a nonprofit agency dedicated to healing children around the world, was influential in helping to bring Wahida to the United States. "There was just so much negativity in Kabul that it just made sense to help Wahida and do something positive in that area of the world."

Since last summer, Wahida has been living with Melissa and Allen Shapiro and their children in Trumbull, Connecticut. "I can already see the confidence she's developed after her surgery," said Melissa Shapiro. "She will no longer live her life with shame or embarrassment - I am so hopeful for Wahida's future."

Wahida was discharged from Jacobi Medical Center on March 6, but will require considerable follow-up care with Dr. Adamo before she returns to Afghanistan. "The thing that touched me most about Wahida's case is her profound gratitude," said Dr. Adamo. "Every time I see her, she says 'Thank You! Thank You!' - and that makes it all worthwhile."