

Invited Comment

The use of Sanskrit, an ancient language, as a tool to evaluate cleft palate speech problems

It is difficult for someone who is neither a speech and language therapist nor familiar with the Sanskrit script to comment authoritatively on this unusual paper. However, as a surgeon with a longstanding interest in the management of cleft palate, I can confirm the vital importance of working together with an experienced speech and language therapist. The authors are correct in stating that few surgeons are capable of making an informed decision on the management of speech problems, even when based on a therapist's report. Indeed we are mere amateurs when it comes to analysing cleft palate speech, and we therefore have to act on the advice of our expert colleagues when it comes to a decision on whether therapy alone or combined with surgery or surgery alone will be the optimal treatment. Would it not be wonderful if we surgeons had a simple way of better understanding individual speech defects so that we could make more informed contributions to discussions on management? After all, we do not like to act as mere technicians.

Whether or not the use of the Sanskrit script will be the

tool that will allow those surgeons who are familiar with it to gain a better understanding of cleft palate speech problems I am not qualified to say, but the authors are persuasive enough to make me think that it is worth trying. One alternative might be to use a tool that was developed in the UK. This is the Cleft Audit Protocol for Speech (CAPS), which was designed to allow the whole cleft team to understand the speech and language therapist's findings.^[1] It would be interesting to learn the views of its authors on this paper.

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REFERENCE

1. Harding A, Harland K, Razzell R. Cleft Audit Protocol for Speech (CAPS). Available from Speech/Language Therapy Department, St. Andrews Centre for Plastic Surgery, Broomfield Hospital: Chelmsford, Essex, UK; 1997.