

Preterm Voice Study

Research overview

Very tiny babies have immature lungs when they are born, and need a tube placed in the windpipe to help them breathe. This tube can damage the voice box and when the child grows up, it can be hard for them to speak in a clear, loud voice.

Research highlights

The Preterm Voice Study is analysing the voices of very preterm children when they are around 6 to 12 years of age. This will help us to determine whether the children's voices are making it difficult for the children to make themselves heard at school. Last year, we reported that almost two thirds of the preterm children we saw had hoarse voices. This year, we have assessed term-born children in the community – hoarse voices are surprisingly common in term-born children too, but these are mostly mild. We found that less than one third of them had hoarse voices – meaning that preterm children are more likely to have difficulties with their voices.

We have now finished the intervention trial and found that some children will get better by themselves – usually, boys whose voices get better following puberty. We have also found that some children – about one third of children we saw - will have a good response to therapy. However, more children did not, and it is necessary now to see larger numbers of children to see if we can predict who will have a positive response to therapy and if there is any other way to help children's voices sound clearer.

Research achievements

Since last year's report, we have published a further three papers in international journals. Another paper, reporting the main outcome of the first phase of the study into the incidence of voice problems in very preterm children, is being considered for publication. The final paper reporting on the outcomes of the therapy trial is being prepared for publication and should be submitted by the end of 2015.



THE TEAM

Investigators

Clinical Associate Prof Noel French FRACP
Prof Karen Simmer AO FRCPC
Clinical Associate Prof Shyan Vijayasekaran FRACS
Dr Suzanne Meldrum PhD
Victoria Reynolds BSc (Hons)

Sponsors

Channel 7 Telethon Trust
Women and Infants Research Foundation