Designing a Paediatric Tongue-Tie Service

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Limitation of function, rather than merely the presence of ankyloglossia, should determine whether intervention is warranted for tongue-tie.

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Background

• Ankyloglossia, or ‘tongue-tie’ is reported to occur in roughly 10% of neonates.
• In some cases a tongue-tie may cause early issues with inadequate milk let-down and maternal nipple pain. If not promptly considered and recognised, this can result in abandonment of breastfeeding or failure to thrive.
• Some tongue-ties are insufficient to affect feeding but their effects can manifest later as speech problems, or oral hygiene and social issues.
• Around the world great variety exists in the structure and practical provision of tongue-tie management services. We sought to identify the optimal features of a comprehensive evidence-based tongue-tie service.

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Methods

A review of the available literature on paediatric tongue-tie management was undertaken.

Results

• Current literature emphasises the importance of a case-by-case functional assessment rather than routine surgical intervention for tongue-tie.
• No clinical assessment tools are validated for widespread use in assessing the suitability of surgical versus non-surgical intervention.
• It is therefore important to ensure a service has access to appropriately trained personnel to provide accurate specialty assessments of the impact of a tongue-tie on function including feeding, speech, and dental hygiene with personnel including midwives, lactation specialists, dentists, and speech and language therapists.
• Timely access to experienced team members can be essential to prevent irreversible complications, particularly in the neonatal period in the face of breastfeeding difficulties.

Conclusions

The management of paediatric tongue-tie requires a dedicated and skilled multidisciplinary team. This requires sufficient flexibility to provide early assessments and intervention to optimise care for neonates and older children. Each child should be managed on an individual basis and appropriate strategies developed to manage their function.