



Boy from Liberia gets gift of a new face at NYU Langone Medical Center

By SARAH ARMAGHAN and OWEN MORITZ
DAILY NEWS WRITERS

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Samuel Urey sees the world in a new way after surgeons do reconstructive surgery to correct his Crouzon Syndrome and restore his sight.

An engaging 7-year-old boy from Liberia got the ultimate Christmas gift Monday: a new face.

Laughing and smiling, Samuel Urey walked out of the NYU Langone Medical Center with his mom after undergoing reconstructive plastic surgery to correct Crouzon Syndrome, a genetic mutation that causes facial deformities.

His mother, Kor Yelegon, recalled how her son was ridiculed by classmates in the capital city of Monrovia for his bulging eyes and misshapen head. Even going to church became difficult, she said.

"[The Crouzon Syndrome] was also affecting his brain and eye functions due to the pressure put on the brain," said Dr. Joseph McCarthy, the hospital's director of plastic surgery. "He also suffered from sleep apnea."

The surgical team led by McCarthy reconstructed the boy's forehead to move it forward, along with his nose and upper jaw, opening his air passages to allow him to breathe better.

The boy made his first visit to the medical center last May, undergoing a complex craniofacial procedure that lasted eight hours. Surgeons made bone cuts in several parts of his skull, forehead and face, and attached a rigid external distraction device.

Urey returned Aug. 12 for removal of the device and underwent additional minor reconstructive surgery on the corners of his eyes.

Doctors said the patient's vision is now almost normal. Urey has more energy, put on weight and breathes and eats comfortably, McCarthy said.

Urey is "very happy with his new face" and restored vision, he said.

The hospital covered the medical costs, and mother and son have been staying this week at the Ronald McDonald house on E. 73d St.

Asked if he likes his new look, the boy replied: "I like the new and the old Samuel."