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Clinicians give their time to treat international patient

Natalia Apaseray has spent a lifetime struggling to eat, drink and speak due to a severe facial deformity but surgeons at South Western Sydney Local Health District are now working to help change the life of the West Papuan woman.

The 26-year-old was born with neurofibromatosis, a condition that has resulted in the malformation of the right side of her face.

After Rotary learned of Ms Apaseray's condition, the young woman was flown to Australia for a series of medical appointments and tests at Liverpool Hospital.

Surgical Specialties Director, plastic and reconstructive surgeon and lead specialist, Dr Michael Kernohan, said Ms Apaseray's medical condition was extremely rare and highly complex.

"There is a team of clinicians working together to put together Natalia's treatment plan," Dr Kernohan said.

"All surgeons are giving their time freely and Rotary will fund Natalia's transport and accommodation costs while she recovers."

The team of specialists includes plastic surgeons, a cardiothoracic surgeon, an ear nose and throat surgeon, ophthalmologist, an interventional radiologist, a clinical psychologist and three anaesthetists.

Ms Apaseray's treatment is expected to start in early 2019 at Liverpool Hospital and will include the removal of a significant portion of the right side of her face and facial reconstruction during a series of staged procedures.

"It is a case of complexity that we as surgeons have never seen before. The surgeries and treatment aren't foreign to us, but putting together such a broad multidisciplinary team is a unique situation," Dr Kernohan said.

Dr Kernohan said many clinicians had put their hand up to assist, including a Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital registrar, who speaks the same language as Ms Apaseray, to assist with interpreting.

"The medical fraternity has come together to help someone in need. Now the hard work begins as we sit down as a team to determine the best way forward for Natalia," he said.

Ms Apaseray said she was now happy about her future which would dramatically change her life.

"I was scared to leave my home but now I want to come back," Ms Apaseray said.