



July 2018 at LVPEI

July was eventful in so many ways.

At the beginning of the month, we had the 6th edition of our Annual "Engineering the Eye" Hackathon organized by the LVPEI Centre for Innovation's Technology group. This new dimension of our Institute's functional arms has become the seat of a lot of excitement, with several activities, enquiries, visitors and potential partnerships. The LVPEI Centre for Innovation was founded after we were inspired by the success of the first Hackathon in 2013, organized in partnership with the world renowned Media lab of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The Centre has progressed well since then and is fulfilling its mandate to improve existing gold standards in Eye care and driving down costs of said functionality by 90%, with some exciting technology products of great promise that will bring eye care within the reach of everyone globally. The Centre was led by Dr. Virender Sangwan until one year ago with support from Cyient Corporation of Hyderabad. This month also saw the transition of leadership from Virender to Raghu Gullapalli, as Virender is moving on.

The 2018 Engineering the Eye Hackathon was led by the new leadership and held at the campus of Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT). Students and young professionals from the domains of engineering, technology, medicine and design from across India and abroad participated. Experts from Carl Zeiss Corporation, Microsoft Garage, Wadhvani Institute for Artificial Intelligence and AT&T, provided technical support in addition to our own group of technical and clinical experts. Prototypes were produced during the 5 days covering a wide range of diagnostic challenges, quantification of diagnostics, assistive technologies for the visually impaired and frugal innovations. It was indeed another successful edition of the "Engineering the Eye" Hackathon.

Moving on from innovation to research, we have hosted the Silver Jubilee Anniversary of the Indian Eye Research group, which is now the India chapter of The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO-India). Started as an effort to develop a collaborative network for our research in Hyderabad with local research Institutes nearly three decades ago, this has grown into a National Organization with all active eye research groups participating in the annual meeting. Several components have been added to foster the culture of research in eye care organizations. Travel fellowships, invited lectures, eponymous lectures, multiple sessions covering all aspects of Eye and Vision Research have become part of these annual events. Young Indian researchers have been benefitting with exposure to the global leaders in various aspects of eye research. This year's "D. Balasubramanian Lecture" was delivered by Prof. Neeru Gupta of the University of Toronto, Canada; the "Bireswar Chakrabarti Lecture" was delivered by Prof. Justine Smith of the Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia and the "S. S. Badrinath Lecture" was delivered by Prof. Vasudevan Lakshminarayanan of the University of Waterloo, Canada. Several other international leaders formed the galaxy of invited speakers that made the meeting a rich feast of science for the two days. Pre-conference workshops allowed for focused discussions on some critical areas. We are indebted to all these stalwarts who were willing to travel at their own expense and provide this much needed dose of inspiration to the young researchers in India. Our thanks are also due to the organizers Subhabrata Chakrabarti, Savitri Sharma, Chitra Kannabiran, Inderjeet Kaur and the research team, who were responsible for organizing this very vibrant conference.

On the Education front, the most significant development was the launch of the first ever Ophthalmology Residency Training Programme in the Republic of Liberia. This was done in affiliation with Liberian College of Physicians and Surgeons. This three year programme is an effort to develop



internal capacity of ophthalmologists in this country; and is based at the Liberia Eye Centre that we have inaugurated over a year ago at the John F Kennedy Medical Center, which is the main medical centre of the country. The faculty will include the Liberian Ophthalmology Head along with three of our ophthalmologists stationed there. This will be supplemented by monthly visits of one of our subspecialty faculty for a week; and three-month rotation for the residents at our Institute in Hyderabad each year. In addition, there will be a significant component of distance education using various technology platforms. Our vision is to make this into a high quality education programme. We are very grateful to the entire group of officers at the Liberian College for their support and encouragement throughout the process. Our thanks are also due to the various officials of the Government of Liberia, the leadership of the John F Kennedy Medical Centre, and to former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for her initial invitation and support. Sam Balasundaram, Rajashekar Varada and Milind Naik from our Institute put this all together.

On the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Miriam Hyman Children Eye Care Centre (MHCECC) at our Mithu Tulsu Chanrai Campus in Bhubaneswar, Prof. Ken Nischal, a world renowned Pediatric ophthalmologist and Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Pittsburgh, was our visiting professor. Ken is a regular visitor and a great inspiration for the entire team of our Child Sight Institute across the network. The MHCECC was named after a young English lady following her tragic death in the London bomb blasts. Over the past decade, her family's munificence has touched the lives of thousands of children in Eastern India keeping her memory alive.

We were delighted to receive the news of the re-designation of our Institute as a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre (WHOCC) for the prevention of blindness. This will be the fifth four-year term of this collaboration. Indeed, this association fostered education to many colleagues from other countries, our participation in planning and formulation of eye care policy globally and regionally, thus allowing us to help in alleviating the problem of blindness and vision impairment on a larger scale.

Several of our colleagues and alumni received honours, both national and international, and my congratulations to each of them.

Finally, this month was also one of extreme sadness for us with the loss of one of our most dedicated colleagues, Sam Balasundaram. Sam, whose association with the Institute started as a patient, went on to become one of the most loved among us by our patients, visitors, collaborators and our colleagues. He was everywhere and one of the greatest ambassadors ever for us. He was indeed the architect of our foray into Liberia and all the progress we have made there, building the necessary framework for a long term partnership with that country. He loved what he did and loved his work in Liberia. He passed away in the way he wanted, with his "boots on", collapsing suddenly during his visit to Liberia. Sam was 65 and is survived by his son, daughter-in-law and a grandson who was the "Apple of his eye", three brothers and scores of loving relatives. Sam has left an indelible mark on everyone in our Institute and will be sorely missed for a long time to come.

- Gullapalli N. Rao