



November 2018 at LVPEI

In late 1981 when I was living in Rochester, New York, our Institute was only an idea. It started taking shape when we took the initial step of setting up a not for profit foundation in the US to mobilize support. The person most responsible for the creation of this foundation and running it for over thirty years was Professor Brijen Gupta. The “Indo-American Eye Care Society” has been an exemplary not for profit organization through which we obtained major support for the creation and growth of our Institute during the first two decades. Brijen’s dedication to this effort was pivotal. It is with extreme sadness that I report of his demise. He has been ailing for the past couple of years. Brijen was educated at Banaras, Oxford and Yale; and he taught at the Universities of Rochester, Chicago and at Columbia. He was an outstanding orator and writer, and a treasure of immense knowledge on diverse subjects. He helped many local American politicians with their speeches and was a father figure for the Indian community of Rochester. Brijen is survived by his son Marty, daughters Sunita and Sheela and their families. In his passing, our Institute lost one of its major founding pillars.

One of the traditions we have adapted from the Western Institutions is the creation of Chairs to recognize work of distinction. I am pleased that two of our colleagues were honoured this month - Prashant Garg, Director and an internationally recognized name on corneal infections with the “Paul Dubord Chair of Cornea”; and Sayan Basu, whose work on stem cell biology is recognized internationally, with the “Virender Sangwan Chair of Ocular regeneration”. Both of them are great examples of what a clinician-scientist is. Congratulations to both of them for this distinction.

There was hectic activity with multiple education programmes from our Academy. These include one of the longest running education programmes on contact lenses in the world, the 54th edition of “The Indian Contact Lens Education Programme (ICLEP)”. Over 5000 contact lens practitioners from all over India have received training through this programme. Introductory Surgical Training Across Specialities on the Right Track (iSTART) for the new comprehensive Ophthalmology trainees and residents is an innovation of Avinash Pathengay, Director of Education. This was an attempt to make them proficient in all the basic skills of microsurgery and lay a strong foundation for further surgical training. Other activities include a Focused Seminar on Anaesthesia and a retraining programme for Vision centre coordinators. Another novel idea introduced by Avinash was “Scholarly Clinic”. The objective of the clinic is to have focussed discussion on an area of interest among likeminded faculty, and to develop common research questions and find answers. This month the focus was on “Ocular Tuberculosis”. Four research projects resulted from these discussions. This initiative could have a huge impact on the understanding of contemporary science.

The activities of our “Institute for Rehabilitation” continue to expand with the inauguration of “Special Needs Clinic” to help clients with multiple disabilities, and this clinic will work alongside the PRK Prasad Centre for Vision Rehabilitation. We gratefully acknowledge the support of RenewSys India Private Ltd for making this possible.

Our special interest in the problem of Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) has yielded positive outcomes with impact both nationally and to some degree internationally. Under Subhadra Jalali's leadership, the ROP programme has successfully completed twenty years. This was celebrated on November 17, on the "World Prematurity Day". The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust released a special movie highlighting LVPEI's journey in this area. Over 17,000 premature babies were screened (through first of its kind city wide NICU based screening), around 4000 eyes were treated with laser and around 3000 underwent surgical intervention. In addition, scores of ophthalmologists from around the world were trained; we helped in the creation of several programmes in India and abroad; and many programmes for advocacy were initiated. Yet another significant event was Annual Children's Day. "Less screen time, more outdoor activities for better child eye health" was the theme of the Children's Eye Care Week, November 11 - 16. The activities organised included awareness walks, drawing competitions, and interactive forums for children and their parents.

Keratoconus is a corneal problem that typically affects young adults. It is getting increasingly recognized even among younger individuals. A Patient Interactive Forum was organized by our Tej Kohli Cornea Institute on November 10 to commemorate the World Keratoconus Day. A "Keratoconus patient support group" was formed to raise public awareness about this problem. Our Institute has treated over 12000 with this condition since inception with various modalities. Our Technology Innovation Centre developed a hand held placid disc, a unique mobile phone mounted topography device, to aid in early diagnosis and screening.

In our continuing interest in areas outside Eye Care, we hosted once again Dhrupad Utsav, a special form of Indian classical music, in collaboration with our state government. These additional facets of activity in art and literature have become a part of our Institute's traditions for which we feel privileged.

The villagers in the southern part of the state of Odisha have a Santa of their own - one that has helped in providing the gift of sight to over 800 of his fellow villagers. This elderly gentleman, himself of small means, selflessly encouraged these people to go to our Arjun Waney Centre in Berhampur and has often personally escorted them. He financed the transport of many. He even made sure they complied with all treatment including follow up visits. His motivation came from a positive outcome from his cataract surgery provided at no cost to him. In addition, he declined to accept the gift of a pair of glasses, instead preferring to pay for them. Who can better personify a true Vision Guardian that we have at the bottom tier of our pyramidal structure? How I wish that we had one such Santa for every village!

- Gullapalli N Rao