



August at LVPEI

One of the major strengths of our institute is the impact our rural eye health network has made in the state of Andhra Pradesh. When we extended our geographical coverage to the state of Odisha (formally known as Orissa) seven years ago, our aspiration was to develop a model of high quality comprehensive eye care. Our first step was the creation of a state-of-the-art tertiary eye care centre in the capital city of Bhubaneswar with the intention to replicate our rural model in this state later. TP Das, who spearheaded our effort in Odisha, has been working tirelessly over the past few years to realise this goal. We got the first break this month when the entire funding for a secondary level eye care centre was granted through the munificence of Dalmia family (a well known corporate group). This centre will be located in a place called Rajgangpur (close to the Dalmia industrial township), and will provide comprehensive eye health coverage to a population of 500,000 people in this neglected area of the country. Prevention programs, health promotion, clinical care, low vision and community based rehabilitation will form the gamut of services, as in our other Secondary Centres. We are very grateful to the donors as well as to all the people involved in the process of obtaining this support. The construction will commence within the next 60 days and the centre will be inaugurated in 15 months. This is yet another example of local philanthropy making the vision of high quality health care possible in remote communities. It is also a great illustration for the willingness of the corporate sector to work with organizations that have a credible track record, and make a difference in the countries around them and beyond. We are now anticipating another two to three secondary centers in this state within the next two to three years. Almost the entire crew for this centre will be recruited from the local communities around Rajgangpur, after their initial training with us. If only we can get ophthalmologists to serve in rural areas, we could multiply these centres exponentially because support is available.

At the other end of the spectrum is some exciting news from the research front with the addition of yet another cell biologist to our stem cell group – Dr. Vivek Singh, who until now was at the Cole Eye Institute, of the Cleveland Clinic. Another couple of scientists currently in the US have also accepted positions with us in this area of research and will come on board within the next 6 to 9 months. This will significantly enhance our research capacity in stem cell biology to address several critical questions in this area. We are excited about these developments which constitute the building blocks for the upcoming 'Institute for Ocular Regeneration' in our Institute. Welcome to Vivek into the LVP family and thanks to Virender Sangwan for all his efforts in continually pushing the frontiers in this area.

Our institute has always played a role in bringing evidence based information to the practicing ophthalmologist in India. In fact, we had our very first continuing medical education programme in 1987 before we inaugurated the Institute, with several members of the renowned cornea service of Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary of Harvard constituting the faculty. This month's continuing education program focused exclusively on refractive surgery with a three-day

symposium and workshop with star studded faculty from around the world. For the first time in India, many critical questions revolving around this topic were discussed and addressed at length. Hopefully, such exercises will exert some restraint on injudicious application of these technologies and minimize morbidity from these procedures. We are thankful to all the distinguished speakers who came from around the world and contributed to the success of this event. Pravin Krishna – head of our refractive surgery, deserves all credit for organising this. The entire LVP team that looked into every detail and contributed to its success deserve special appreciation.

Uncorrected refractive error is now recognized globally as the number one cause of vision impairment. In countries like India this problem is more acute. In rural areas where services are either not available or accessible, one barrier is the lack of good quality professionals to perform refractions and dispense the necessary spectacles. Since our inception, we have been training multiple cadres of professionals to meet this demand through both long term education programs as well as workshops for people who are already in practice. In collaboration with India Vision Institute, we held a workshop in our Bhubaneswar campus for optometrists and students from the Eastern part of India which turned out to be quite successful. Thanks to all the faculty and Sirajum Monira of our Bhubaneswar campus. In the earlier years, we worked with the International Centre for Eye Care Education (ICEE) to conduct training programs for trainers and practitioners across the country.

India is a country with the largest magnitude of corneal blindness and we continue to have significant paucity of donor corneas to meet the demands of corneal transplantations. Against an estimated need of a hundred thousand transplants a year, the country is currently performing only around twenty thousand. Several efforts at various levels were being made and our Eye Bank has always played a leadership role in this effort. The last week of August and first week of September of each year constitute the 'Eye Donation Fortnight' in India. A series of events happen across the country. Our eye bank group was involved in many such activities to enhance public awareness about the need for eye donation in future. While we have made significant progress in Hyderabad during the past twenty five years and reached an enviable position of even sharing corneas with colleagues in other cities, we still have a long way to go elsewhere in the country. Interest in this area is growing and with an active role being played by international organisations such as SightLife of Seattle, and increasing support extended by the Indian Government, India may be able to address the issue of corneal blindness more effectively by 2020.

Visitors from Johns Hopkins University, University of Minnesota, University of Rochester, Royal Australian and New Zealand college of Ophthalmologists were with us this month and several discussions were held on possible collaborations in the area of education and research. Some exciting possibilities emerged from these interactions.

I conclude by congratulating Jay Chhablani of our Retina Service in Hyderabad for the "Honor Award" he received from the American Society of Retinal Specialists, so early in his career.

Gullapalli N Rao