



January at LVPEI

Soona and Edward Brown live in the south of France and are among the greatest supporters of our Institute's work. Their association with our group started when they initially contacted me after listening to a story, broadcast on BBC, about our children's eye care centre funded by the Miriam Hyman Trust at our Bhubaneswar campus. This then evolved into the creation of "The David Brown Children's Eye Care Centre" in another of our new tertiary care campuses (Vijayawada), in memory of their son David, with their financial support. More recently, the couple extended their support further by committing to fund the development of a secondary centre in a rural area. This culminated in the ground breaking ceremony of our TWELFTH secondary centre (near Sattenapalli of Guntur district) during their visit last month, coinciding with the anniversary of The David Brown Children's Eye Care Centre.

While our rural "village vision" is expanding, it is not part of the original vision I had when I returned from the US in 1986 with the idea of starting an eye centre in Hyderabad. The vision then was limited to creating a high quality, comprehensive advanced tertiary care centre encompassing patient care, education and research – essentially the formula of western university eye centres. The only exception was the thought of integrating rehabilitation also as a component to make the centre truly "comprehensive" in its scope.

However, the exposure to the quality of eye care available in rural areas through the type of complications that we had to treat in the initial years, and my own rural upbringing in the formative years of my life, propelled us in the direction of "high quality comprehensive care in rural areas". After much thought we selected a village with a population of about 2000 located in one of the least developed geographic areas of the state (Mudhole in Adilabad district). Gnanadurai Michael, then head of CBM, South Asia even taunted me and offered support if we ever decided to go forward. He was joined by D. Nagarajan, then India head of Sight Savers International (SSI). With their support, the concept of a "Comprehensive Secondary Care Eye Centre" was translated into reality. There was, however, a lot of pessimism about this "adventure" from within the institute.

A local NGO GRAM Abhyuday Mandali paid for the land acquired from the government and CBM and SSI provided capital funding for building and equipment to cover two thirds of the cost. As the news spread in the neighboring villages, a businessman's family from an adjoining village came forward to cover the remaining one third of the cost. Most of the staff were recruited from the villages in the area and trained in Hyderabad. Thus started the very first satellite secondary eye care centre of our institute, nearly 18 years ago. It now serves about 20,000 outpatients, performs 3,000 plus surgical procedures, is involved in school screening and community awareness programs, offers community based Rehabilitation services, and has initiated screening for diabetes and hypertension. It is linked to a cluster of 10 primary care vision centres and has a model comprehensive community development programme that was initiated. Indeed, it is now a model of "Integrated Comprehensive Secondary and Primary Eye Care" in rural areas.



This beginning has taken us into eleven other geographic locations and this “Edward and Soona Brown Eye Centre” will extend our foot print into yet another geographic area district.

January was a busy month on several other fronts. Many from the LVP family have received awards and honours of distinction. Leading the pack is our vice-chair, T.P. Das, who was named in the list of Republic Day honours from the President of India and he will receive the award of Padma Shri later this year (something akin to a British Knighthood). This takes our score to THREE for this honour. Congratulations TP! Subhadra Jalali and Sujata Das won the prestigious P. Siva Reddy Medal and B.K. Narayana Rao Medal respectively from the All India Ophthalmological Society (AIOS) at the recently held combined meeting of Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology (APAO) and All India Ophthalmological Society (AIOS).

Scores of presentations were made by our group at this meeting with some getting the Best Paper honor in their respective sections. They all make us proud and our congratulations to them.

With so many eminent personalities in the field of Ophthalmology visiting us from all over the globe and quite a few of them spending extra time with us, we had a feast of education sessions. Our group benefitted immensely from these interactions as well as collaborations that have evolved. It is on these strong relationships and generosity of individuals, willing to devote their time and talent, that we have built strong foundations of quality in care and education.

January also happens to be the month when we traditionally welcome a large group of new trainees into several of our programs; a very warm welcome to them. They came from all corners of India and few countries outside India.

Heartwarming news continues to come from our eye banks. Ramayamma International Eye Bank (RIEB) in our Hyderabad campus bettered its previous record achieved only last month, securing donation of 460 corneas in this month. Drishti Daan Eye Bank in our Bhubaneswar campus followed this trend and achieved its best ever record. Our sincere appreciation to these eye banking teams for this superlative performance. The significance of this lies in the impact it would have on the eye banks in the rest of India and hopefully lead to achieving the aspiration of “100,000 cornea transplants in India” by the year 2020.

An Indo–US Symposium on “Novel tools and themes in vision sciences” was held by our research group in conjunction with Uday Kompella of the University of Colorado. This was supported by the Indo-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) and attended by 50 participants including 9 resource persons from the U.S. Many new ideas were discussed and some of these will be translated into projects in the near future that would be relevant in addressing many issues of blindness and visual impairment.



The annual Champalimaud Research Symposium was held on 30th with a stellar list of speakers, and with David Williams from the University of Rochester, this year's joint winner of the € 1.0 million Champalimaud Prize for breakthrough in vision research, delivering the Champalimaud Lecture. Other speakers included luminaries from Europe and India. We were delighted that Dr. Leonor Beleza, and Mr. Joao Botelho, one of the trustees of Champalimaud Foundation were here, as they do every year on this day. With all the above interactions in research combined with a few others over the previous two months, our research agenda is filled to the brim.

Our Bhubaneswar campus continues on its record breaking spree exceeding its previous highest of the monthly volume of surgeries. Kudos to the entire team.

As our vision centre programme continues to move into more and more rural areas, local philanthropy is getting ever bigger. Our 92nd vision centre was inaugurated and the supporters included a retired professor from the famous Indian Institute of Technology in Mumbai, a senior executive of Google and one of our anesthesiologists from our Vijayawada Kode Venkatadri Chowdary Campus. This brings our total score to 111(localities where LVPEI is present).

I am happy that 2013 got off to a great start with so many activities reflective of enhanced quality and quantity as well as expansion of our footprint and promise of consequent impact.