



## June at LVPEI

One of the greatest joys of our journey with the vision centre program, particularly in the recent past, has been the level of community participation and support. During my recent visit to our GMR Varalakshmi campus (our tertiary eye care centre in the city of Vishakhapatnam), I was introduced to a gentleman who personified another dimension of such involvement. Mr. Murthy has retired from government service and is actively working with the pensioners' association in his native village Yelamanchili, in Vishakhapatnam district. Through his personal initiative he prompted this group to donate space for our centre in this village. What is more inspiring in this case than the other amazing tales of our vision centres of the recent past is that Murthys have taken our Vision technician as part of their own family and in fact, consider him as one of their children. These kinds of bonds allowing stronger integration into the local communities of our vision technicians will certainly facilitate greater effectiveness of our country, breaking many social and cultural barriers. Yelamanchili is one of the most underserved communities in terms of eye health coverage.

Vishakhapatnam campus has also celebrated another mile stone in its eye banking history by harvesting more than 100 corneas during this month, a maiden feature for this eye bank. This is because of the leadership provided by the eye bank manager P. V Narayana. This eye bank has now evolved as the one of the most active eye banks in the country and is technically supported by SightLife of the United States. Founded and run by strong community leadership from diverse backgrounds, the Mohsin eye bank moved to our campus following our inauguration and is a true illustration of a "Community eye bank" - eye bank that belongs to the entire community but not to one organisation or hospital. This promotes equitable distribution of donor corneas to all in need in that community.

Both eye banking and primary eye care provided through our vision centres, depend significantly on mid level ophthalmic personnel, vision technicians in the case of Vision Centres and eye bank technicians and grief counselors in the case of eye banking. If these cadres are trained properly with a regular program of continuing education later on in their careers, significant strides can be made in the elimination of avoidable blindness. We have been fortunate to have vibrant training programs for these two cadres that have been making this need of well qualified professionals in many countries.

The future of health care in general and eye care in particular depends on many innovations that will pursue a multi disciplinary approach to have an impact on a large population like India. This will be possible if we provide the appropriate milieu to future generations to blossom. The recent experience we had in Hyderabad when two middle school students excelled in their summer projects with us, made it clear that so much of latent talent exists in these future generations. The outcomes of this exercise encouraged us so much that we now plan to have a summer program for school children as a regular feature. Well done, Moms! (Both Padmaja & Sirisha are on our faculty).

On the research front our Visual Psycho physics group is pursuing some exciting work in collaboration with world renowned Pablo Artal and his team from Spain. Professor Artal is a world renowned expert on adaptive optics. Their work will lead to better understanding of perception and the development of objective for grading of cataracts through modified aberrometer which will have significant implications to the area of cataract research, by possibly improving the current systems.

Advocacy is an important integral part of our Institute's work. We had a great opportunity to do this at the State level recently when the speaker of the AP Legislative Assembly invited our team to come and screen all the members of the assembly from across the State. The interaction with this group was very interesting and will hopefully help us to bring the issues of blindness and visual impairment on to the radars of these policy makers.

We are also excited that our "Vision technician training program" has received accreditation from IJCAHPO. This, coming from such a reputed organization is a big booster for our vision technician program and enhances the opportunities for the cadre, so essential for primary eye care in underserved areas.

Following in the footsteps of great institutions around the world, we have embarked in the path of establishing "Named Chairs" over the past decade, recognizing those who made valuable contributions to our Institute with their time or talent or treasure. I am pleased that our colleague and renowned cornea specialist Virender Sangwan has been chosen for the Institute's "Dr. Paul Dubord Chair of Cornea", named after our long term friend, supporter and a well known corneal specialist, Dr. Paul Dubord of Vancouver, Canada. This is one of the six named chairs we currently have at our institute.

From the Honors front our Glaucoma colleague, Harsha Rao was invited to be a member of Associate advisory board of the world glaucoma association and Prashant Garg – Director of education was selected for the Senior Achievement Award of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO). Congratulations to both of them on this well deserved recognition.

We started this month celebrating the 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our institute on 1<sup>st</sup> of June. The simple but joyous celebration heralded another new year for us at the institute. This past year, the first one of the second quarter century of our journey, was indeed a period of intense activity with focus on both consolidation and growth.

Gullapalli N Rao