



November at LVPEI

In India, we have celebrated the "National Newborn Week" this month and the 21st was designated as "Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) Day". A greater cause for celebration for us was when our colleague, Padmaja Rani, examined the **ten thousandth baby** in Hyderabad under this program. I want to place on record our appreciation to Subhadra Jalali, for initiating the "Indian Twin Cities ROP Screening Programme" and making twin cities Hyderabad and Secunderabad the first ones in India to have the distinction of complete surveillance of all neonatology units. This model programme deserves to be replicated across all cities in India and other developing countries to control this avoidable cause of childhood blindness. Now Subhadra is on a mission to extend this across the entire state of Andhra Pradesh, by training ophthalmologists across all sectors, with the vision of eliminating the scourge of ROP related blindness from our state. Most parts of the state were already covered. In addition, over 350 ophthalmologists from all over India and other developing countries were trained, and that would significantly enhance the impact.

Another public health problem looming large, with significant potential to cause blindness is Diabetes Mellitus. Diabetic Retinopathy is one of the major causes of blindness globally. The magnitude of Diabetes is very high in India with the future projections looking even more daunting. There is no effective public health approach to tackle this problem currently.

On "World Diabetes Day", the 14th of this month, nearly 6,000 people participated in 20 events held in our entire network. These included such events as awareness meetings, Diabetes walks, Diabetic retinopathy screening programs and patient education forums with excellent media and news coverage. In the Diabetic retinopathy awareness program conducted in Ongole, in the Prakasam district (our model district), nearly 150 participants - Registered medical practitioners, ASHAs (accredited social health activists) and ANMs from all cadres of health sector representing villages from entire district - attended the program. The program was interactive with a focus on education of health professionals dealing with Diabetes and creating awareness about Diabetic eye disease with emphasis on screening, appropriate referral and management. Nonmydriatic camera retinal photography was also performed. All these became part of our endeavor to tackle Diabetic Retinopathy on all fronts and identify appropriate solutions for larger impact.

American Academy of Ophthalmology's annual meeting is the biggest ophthalmic congregation in the world – clinicians, scientists, managers, allied ophthalmic professionals and industry come together from all corners of the world to interact and share the current information on everything from techniques to technology to delivery of eye care. Our Institute was represented with a sizeable contingent and together made over 40 presentations. Prashant Garg was the President of the "Ophthalmic Microbiology and Immunology Group" (U.S based group dealing with infection of the eye) and was also the recipient of the "Senior Achievement Award" from the Academy. Ramesh Kekunnaya, Head of Children's Eye Care Centre, also received the "Achievement Award". These awards are in recognition of their cumulative contributions to the academic activities at these annual meetings over the years.



Congratulations to all of them! In addition, several of us had multiple meetings with existing collaborators as well as new ones to discuss the progress and the way forward.

A renewal of a five year grant from Champalimaud Foundation for translational research was welcome news which further consolidates our partnership with this unique Portuguese Foundation. During the first five years, our "Champalimaud Translational Research Centre for Eye Research"(C-TRACER) has made significant progress in the area of genetics and stem cell biology. New genes were identified; new techniques were developed in stem cell transplantation with the potential to benefit hundreds of thousands of people around the world. We are making forays into new approaches in both these areas with potentially exciting outcomes.

"Hospital Cornea Retrieval Programme" is an approach we have adapted from the U.S nearly 23 years ago and implemented in Hyderabad. This has now spread all across India. Active support from the staff of the participating hospitals is pivotal for this success. To enhance this cooperation, our eye bank group started a new approach - introducing a corneal transplant recipient to the staff in our partner hospitals. The idea behind was "seeing is believing" – that the people who work to motivate donor families actually meet a recipient whose sight was restored through corneal transplantation. This is yet another new approach of advocacy for eye donation.

Application of technology is playing a major role in the integration of our various activities across our complex network. Our in-house developed Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system is playing a critical role in this. This is expanding rapidly and this month the total number of centres covered reached twenty five. Our EMR team is toiling hard to complete the integration of our entire network in the next 12 to 15 months.

Finally, my travel during this month extended to many cities in the US and to the Amazon region of Brazil. Existing collaborations were strengthened, new ones were forged and more friends were added through the various interactions covering areas of education, research, management and replication of our model elsewhere. While the Brazilian segment revolved mainly around strengthening the collaboration of the network of Champalimaud Translation Centres, the boat ride on the mighty Amazon was something of a very special experience. Our ophthalmologist friends in Manaus and Sao Paulo overwhelmed us with the warmth of their hospitality. Amidst the breathtaking sights around the river, we were also impressed by the innovative ways our friends in Brazil are reaching out to these far flung communities and providing eye care. Our consortium of Champalimaud Translational Centres discussed the possibilities of collaboration among our groups to make this even better. We are definitely excited.

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