



June at LVPEI

This month, we celebrated a major landmark; not only for our Institute but, in some sense, for all of India. This was the Silver Jubilee celebration of our eye bank. This distinction is because of multiple reasons – success in the area of organ donation in a country where the belief was one of impossibility; success in creating an eye bank of very high international standards; success in achieving continuous growth and in inspiring others to emulate the model across India and other developing countries; success in creating a momentum nationally, in creating a generation of professional eye bankers, and a great model of partnership encompassing international groups, the corporate sector, philanthropists, civil society, government, medical professionals and local communities; success in creating a highly effective hospital cornea retrieval programme, in impacting corneal blindness in India, and in exposing ophthalmologists to the realm of possibilities in the area of corneal transplantation – all adequate to inspire other organ donation efforts to push ahead. And thankfully, that is happening.

On June 27, 1989, with the technical support from International Federation of Eye Banks of Baltimore, USA with great personal involvement of its President, Frederick Griffith and philanthropic support from the family of Mrs. Gunnam Ramayamma, the Ramayamma Eye Bank was inaugurated. Nearly 47,000 corneas were harvested and about 24,000 corneal transplants were performed. The partnership with Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences was crucial for this success as we started the very first "Hospital Cornea Retrieval Programme" in India there, thanks to the very warm support from Dr. Kakarla Subba Rao, Director. The high rate of positive responses obtained in this endeavour set off a cycle of replication across many major cities in India and some other countries. We are grateful to all of these above groups as well as to Eyesight International and Paul Dubord of Canada, ORBIS International and more recently SightLife and its President, Monty Montoya for their support in scaling, advancing and expanding into the areas of education, research, advocacy, and policy and planning.

We are now moving towards a vision of harvesting 10,000 donor corneas annually by the year 2020. Given the enormity of the burden of corneal blindness in India, this escalation of our target is critical to effectively control it. Corneal blindness is a leading cause of blindness in India, some Asian countries, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean countries.

One new development in the recent past has been the increasing partnership with the technology sector. Tech Mahindra Foundation, the philanthropic arm of one of the leading IT corporations of India, has been supporting our rehabilitation group for the past few years in multiple projects. This month, yet another project was launched by Ms. Indira Manjuluri, Global Head of Retail, focusing on community based rehabilitation of the visually impaired in the slums of Hyderabad city and neighbouring areas, through a door-to-door intervention.

Visitors from "Ramon Marti Bonet Foundation against blindness" from Barcelona, Spain and from their local partners in Anantapur visited us and had productive discussions on early intervention with our rehabilitation group.



The month also had its share of other celebrations including the anniversaries of two of our secondary centres.

The story of 90 year-old Gorantla Malkondaiah from a rural village in Prakasam district sums it all for the month of June. A victim of scoliosis, he was blind with advanced cataract in both eyes. He was identified during our community screening programme and after great persuasion agreed to undergo surgery. Despite having to perform surgery in a semi-supine position our surgeons did a miraculous job and restored his sight. He walked out of the hospital, unassisted, with a smile.

- Gullapalli N Rao