



## December at LVPEI

2015 came to a close with several significant and transformative events. The inauguration of the "Tej Kohli Cornea Institute", based on our vision of creating "Institutes of Excellence" as developed about two years ago. Creating "Global Resource Centres" in certain niche areas was a transformative development with opportunity for us to take a quantum leap in this area and scale up our efforts towards containing all forms of needless corneal blindness, globally. This encompasses direct service, creation of impactful service delivery models, education of professionals, research into corneal problems critical to developing countries, capacity building, advocacy, and active participation in policy formulation and planning at all levels. Supported by technology entrepreneur and philanthropist, Mr. Tej Kohli, who made a major financial commitment to this cause (the biggest our Institute has ever had from a single source), this was launched on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December by the Governor of our state, Hon'ble ESL Narasimhan. All this happened through the introduction of our Institute to Mr. Kohli by Prof. May Griffith of Linköping University, Sweden, who is a long term collaborator of ours in the area of biosynthetic corneas. The subsequent nine-month long dialogue culminated in the creation of this Institute. As can be expected, this produced a lot of excitement considering the huge opportunity it presents. Our dynamic young corneal specialist, Pravin Krishna Vaddavalli, will be the Institute's first Director. Congratulations Pravin! I wish to place on record our deep gratitude to Mr. Tej Kohli for making this big leap possible for us through his munificence. We are delighted that we have found a synergy between his aspiration to make a difference to the corneal blind and our desire to pursue such a path to advance the efforts to control corneal blindness. Corneal blindness is most prevalent in India, other Asian countries and Sub-Saharan Africa, and is more common in the younger age group with significant socio-economic consequences.

What better way to celebrate this major development than the news that our eye bank ended the year with a record 5,484 corneas with 2,765 of these corneas being used for transplantation? This is a national record for eye banking and all previous records of ours have been broken. Kudos to the eye bank team led by Hariharan and Sunita Chaurasia!

Yet another event held this month to promote better care of corneal problems was an advanced course on "Modern surgical techniques of corneal transplantation", sponsored by our long term collaborator, SightLife of Seattle, USA. Our faculty was assisted by faculty from the US and UK. Participants came from all over India. These techniques help to enhance the utilisation of donor corneas, and make the procedure simpler with good outcomes. These are all part of our "Training the Trainers" programmes with their power of multiplication of impact.

While on the topic of education and "Training the Trainers", a workshop was held for "Training of Trainers" in optical dispensing with support from the Regional office of the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Agency for the Prevention of



Blindness (IAPB). Participants came from five countries of South-East Asia. This meets an important requirement of bridging a resource gap in the critical area of correcting visual impairment through dispensing of proper spectacles. Shortage of trained dispensing opticians is a glaring gap in the eye health human resources in developing countries.

Our expansion in the state of Odisha continued with the inauguration of the third secondary eye care centre in Berhampur by the state's Chief Minister, Mr. Naveen Patnaik. The centre is supported by "Mission for Vision" with major funding from the Savitri Waney Trust of UK. The Chairman of Savitri Waney Trust Mr. Arjun Waney, an internationally reputed restaurateur was present on the occasion, along with Dr. Prakash Mirchandani, Trustee of Mission for Vision, and other members of Waney family. TP Das, our Vice-Chair led the charge to build this centre, supported by the rural eye health and Bhubaneswar teams. We are very grateful to the donors for helping us create this centre. This is yet another example of philanthropy, coupled with government support at the highest levels, thus co-creating a gateway for high quality, comprehensive eye care for an underserved population.

We often hear of the emphasis on "Translational Research" these days in many discussions on research policy, something which our Institute has been committed to, with great emphasis, right from the inception. An environment of cross fertilisation among all groups of researchers – clinical, basic, public health, etc. – was created in our Institute with all the groups participating in discussions twice a week and research involving many themes. The "Cross-talk" that was held this month brought together all our faculty, both clinical and all other research groups from across our network, to review and to look into the future, with active participation from all. The success of this exercise led to the decision to make it an annual feature.

While the "Tej Kohli Cornea Institute" is an expression of the highest level of giving from a successful entrepreneur, the story of a school girl, blind from cataract in both eyes, demonstrated the spirit of giving in many humans irrespective of their wealth. On the restoration of her sight from surgery, which was provided at no cost to them, her parents came to our campus in Vijayawada with two litres of milk and a bag full of vegetables as a gift. This all pervasive spirit of giving and sharing keeps alive the spirit of optimism about our world.

- Gullapalli N. Rao