



January at LVPEI

What better way to start a new year than with the news that our Institute achieved a historic milestone of TWENTY THOUSAND corneal transplants. When I returned to India in 1986 after spending over a decade in the area of corneal transplantation, the oft repeated advice was to forget about practicing that in India as “Indians don't donate eyes or organs” and “corneal transplants don't work in Indian eyes”. This was an instance where the “road not taken approach” helped immensely and our accomplishment more than validates our stand. Several milestones have been achieved along the way in eye banking and care of corneal disease - in service, education, research, advocacy and development of innovative models. While we were privileged to serve thousands directly, the indirect impact is even greater with nearly two thirds of all corneal specialists in India and dozens in other countries being trained by us. Numerous individuals and organisations from all over the world have helped us in this eventful journey. To all of them, we are indebted.

Soonaa and Edward Brown live in the south of France. Now in their retirement years, they had first heard of our Institute from a BBC news story, and thereafter Edward contacted me expressing a desire to be associated with us. The first project was the Children's Eye Care Centre in memory of their son, David, in our newest Tertiary centre near the city of Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh that celebrated its fourth anniversary last month. Subsequently they decided to support the creation of a rural secondary eye care centre. The “Edward and Soonaa Eye Care Centre” was inaugurated on the 12th of January in one of the underserved areas of Andhra Pradesh (Dhulipala village of Sattenapalle mandal in Guntur district).We were delighted to have three generations of the Brown family join us on the occasion. As is the tradition of our secondary service centres, this centre will provide high quality, comprehensive eye care to all people using an eye care team trained to care for a population of 500,000.

Srinivas Marmamula, our optometrist – public health researcher continued his ascent with his selection for a “Wellcome trust / DBT India Alliance – Early Career Fellowship”. Congratulations to Srinivas for succeeding in getting the highly competitive grant. Added to this was Prashant Garg's grant from the Medical Research Council of U.K in collaboration with scientists at the University of Sheffield.

As we grow rapidly, the strengthening of systems and processes for the entire network becomes a compelling need. Ramam Atmakuri, who has held several leadership positions in the corporate sector for over two decades, has come on board as Executive Vice Chair over three months ago. He was in Philadelphia at the invitation of “Project Management Institute” as a member of the faculty. Ramam has been involved in this activity for some time and is considered a valuable member of the group. While there, he visited the world renowned Wilmer Eye Institute of Johns Hopkins to gain a broader perspective on the running of eye institutions. Our other Vice Chair and Glaucoma expert G. Chandrasekhar was an invited speaker at a Symposium held at the other famous eye Institute, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami, and participated in the discussion on the appropriate surgical techniques for the care of glaucoma. Knowing him, I am sure that he would have made quite an impression.



Our commitment to high quality education continues unabated with a number of efforts, both to enhance the quality as well to scale up our programmes. The Director of our Academy for Education, Prashant Garg, attended the Harvard-Macy Course for Medical Educators in Boston and has begun working on implementing the pearls he picked from that course to help us move into the next orbit. As part of our ongoing programme for many years in collaboration with the World Health Organization, another “pediatric eye care team” is with us for training, from Myanmar. This group will then initiate an active children's eye care programme in their country. An annual week long workshop on all aspects of “Ocular Surface Disorders” was a great success; enrollment was limited to corneal specialists and participants came in from the US, Brazil, Mexico and Ethiopia along with those from India. A new batch started with the “Diploma in Community Eye Health” course this month that included students from Nepal, Sudan and Rwanda. These students will then return to lead eye health initiatives in their countries. This is also the month when we get a new group of trainees for post-residency fellowships in various sub specialties and comprehensive ophthalmology. Of the eighteen, seventeen are from across India while the eighteenth one is from Accra, Ghana. Completing this list of students on education programmes with us is a batch of interns from Johns Hopkins Carey School of Business. These Business Management students from different schools help us in evaluating and improving many of our systems and processes. The geographic diversity of our trainees makes our Education Academy that much more vibrant and enhances “learning”. We are always proud of the indirect impact that our institute is making around the world through the work of our alumni. The following letter from an alumna from Italy is an illustration of that:

Dear Dr. Subhadra Jalali,

One year back, I had just left LVEPI after an amazing ROP fellowship and a great time in your superb country. The major difference in these 12 months is my profession now. I am currently placed in the regional ROP center and work on ROP in OPD and NICU in my city in Italy.

This adventure started with a scholarship in July. The beginning was not at all easy. I guess you may remember of the feeling of starting a new path alone, deciding when laser was needed and when waiting was better, dealing with parents and trying to give hope in all possible situations, fighting against time with never ending energy. I will never forget your peaceful talks to parents, and even if I could not understand the words, your sweetness and hope were a lesson for me. Once, on a PowerPoint, you showed me a sentence in Sanskrit “Teacher is God; Guest is God”. I remember it often and am thankful to you for being my teacher.

We are indeed fortunate to have the likes of Subhadra in multiples in our group and that is making all the difference.

- Gullapalli N. Rao