



## **March 2018 at LVPEI**

When an eighty year old lady, blinded in both eyes by corneal disease, had her sight restored, she was ecstatic and started dancing. The fact that she has regained her independence was a cause for celebration. This was a joyous scene during the last week of March in the waiting lounge of Liberia Eye Centre in Monrovia, capital city of the West African Nation, Liberia. Equally excited was the surgeon, Somasheila Murthy, Head of Cornea Service at our Hyderabad campus. Somasheila felt that this sole experience was worth all the hard work she endured to develop the necessary expertise. Her travel to Liberia was part of our programme to help in building an eye health system for this country ravaged for long by internal strife, with near decimation of health care infrastructure. Four corneal transplants were performed by her during the week, with donor corneas supplied by SightLife from Seattle, which we gratefully acknowledge. With this, the total number of corneal transplants ever done in Liberia reached eight, with the four earlier ones done by another colleague, Bhupesh Bagga. Two of our ophthalmologists are based in the eye centre who provide the needed follow-up care. One faculty member from our Institute supplements this for a week each month in different subspecialty areas. This system allows for provision of much needed services in different subspecialties of the eye. Availability of all these services at no cost to the economically disadvantaged is a new phenomenon in Liberia, aligning with our vision of reconciling Excellence with Equity.

We are now moving to the next phase of our project through “Capacity Building for Eye Care” and awaiting clearance from the Liberian College of Physicians and Surgeons (LCPS) to start residency training in ophthalmology for Liberian physicians. Two of the officers from LCPS visited us during this month and left with very positive feelings about what we can offer. We are grateful to Drs. Benjamin Harris and Jeanetta Johnson for making this visit. Our vision is to build internal capacity for ophthalmic care in Liberia over the next 7-8 years. Several other primary care and training initiatives are at various stages of evolution.

Extension of our frontiers continued further with the inauguration of our network’s eighteenth secondary level eye care centre in Keonjhar, in North Odisha. This has a special significance as it is the product of the exceptional philanthropic spirit of multiple ophthalmologists - donation of ancestral property in the heart of the town by Dr. Rajinder Kalsi Patnaik in memory of her late husband, Dr. Bijayananda Patnaik, both renowned Retina specialists of New Delhi; with funding through the Combat Blindness International of Madison, Wisconsin, founded by Prof. Suresh Chandra, another renowned Retina specialist; and finally the design and implementation of the project was spearheaded by our own Retina specialist, T P Das. We are deeply indebted to Dr. Catherine Taylor of Jack Deloss Taylor Charitable Trust, USA, for providing significant funding in memory of her father Jack Deloss Taylor that made this centre a reality. This magnificent facility was inaugurated by the Health Minister of Odisha, Shri Pratap Jena in the presence of Shri Badri Narayan Patra, Minister for School and Mass Education. This centre will provide comprehensive eye care services of high quality to the people in the region with primary focus on half a million people around Keonjhar. We acknowledge the contributions made by our entire team of engineers and rural eye health group to get the centre ready on time.



Following our foray into the production of special type of contact lenses, the “Boston Scleral Contact Lenses” a few months ago, active distribution of these lenses has commenced and the feedback on their performance was very positive. As this gains momentum, it opens a new avenue for the treatment of a variety of recalcitrant corneal problems, the burden of which is very high in India and other developing countries. Making these lenses available at an affordable cost makes this modality very valuable.

The Engineering research group, whose performance during the past two years has been immensely beneficial to the Institute, secured a major grant from BIRAC (Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council) to setup an incubation centre for medical care technology. Newer facilities are being created that will enhance capacity for research and product development. This will augment this group’s ability to provide better service as well as develop innovative products.

Prashant Garg’s corneal infections group is blazing new trails in the areas of anti-microbial resistance and drug delivery. An internationally recognized name in the area of corneal infections, Prashant’s collaboration with English scientists in the areas of polymer chemistry and nanotechnology is offering great promise for early diagnosis and more effective treatment of corneal infections, with significant positive impact on corneal blindness. Patents and peer-reviewed publications are already in the pipeline. This research is supported by grants from Wellcome Trust of UK and Indian Department of Biotechnology.

Ashik Mohamed is a Physician – Biophysicist and is involved in an active collaboration with world renowned Jean Marie-Parel of Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in the U.S. We were pleased to hear of his selection to receive the University of New South Wales (Australia) Alumni award for the year 2018. Ashik got his doctoral qualification from this university. We were equally pleased that Ramesh Kekunnaya, Head of our Child Sight Institute was invited to deliver the prestigious William Gilles Lecture by the Australian and New Zealand Strabismus Society at their annual meeting held in Sydney. To both of them and many others who added lustre to our Institute’s image, my congratulations!

Our primary care vision centre tally moved to 171 with the inauguration of two additional Centres during this month.

March is the end of our financial year coinciding with India’s financial year. While I will give more details of the year in the annual report, I am pleased to inform that it was marked by much progress and many accomplishments. To everyone who has made this possible, I express my profound gratitude.

- Gullapalli N Rao