



April 2019 at LVPEI

The annual meeting of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) is a prestigious scientific event, where we always participate actively with a sizable contingent. This meeting attracts around ten thousand researchers from all parts of the world presenting their latest and the best work. This US based organization has now become a major international body. At this year's meeting in Vancouver, thirty-three members from our team presented their work covering many aspects of eye and vision research, and also contributed to workshops and committees. While providing an opportunity to present their work, this meeting also provides an enabling environment to nurture and inspire young talent, foster collaborations, and opportunities to mingle with the best and the brightest in the field. Every one returns home freshly charged with new ideas for their work. I am happy that our strong tradition of encouraging and supporting our researchers to attend that meeting has contributed significantly to our research productivity. A highlight at this meeting was the appointment of Subhabrata Chakrabarti on the programme committee of ARVO International. Congratulations to Subho!

Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust was created to mark and celebrate the sixty-year contribution of Her Majesty The Queen to the Commonwealth. As it is an organization with a finite lifespan, the Trust wished to support a programme that can produce tangible and visible results in short span of time; and "Prevention of blindness and Eye care" was chosen. Our group has been engaged in three of the programmes. The first one on the condition of Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) is a major cause of blindness in children; the second on Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) is a major cause of blindness in the adults and elderly; and the third was in training of Ophthalmologists from other commonwealth countries. In ROP, Subhadra Jalali from our Institute led the project, which included creating a service delivery model; capacity building in children's and other district level hospitals; and training of ophthalmologists, neonatologists and pediatricians. This was quite impactful. The DR project was conducted along the same lines. For the training programmes, several ophthalmologists were trained from different countries, mostly from sub Saharan Africa in different subspecialties. Many went on to develop these services in their countries. All these efforts will have a lasting impact and help to avert blindness in many, and restore sight for many more.

The Vice-Patron of the Trust, Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex, Sophie, visited us during this month to see firsthand the work we are doing, and complimented the members of our group involved in these endeavors.

Several education programmes for our staff as well as continuing education for many cadres of eye care professionals were conducted during this month. One area that needs significant attention is the development of low vision rehabilitation professionals; and these include new education programmes, enhancing the quality of existing ones, and continuing education for the current professionals. Another critical area is to raise awareness among all eye care professionals about the benefits that low vision rehabilitation can provide to many of their patients. This month's programmes were designed to address these needs.



On the research front, the publication of a major systematic review related to innovation in stem cell transplantation, Simple Limbal Epithelial Transplantation (SLET), was very encouraging. The article demonstrated the long term benefit for preservation and restoration of sight with this technique; and it is now used worldwide. Congratulations to the entire stem cell group headed by Sayan Basu!

Another contribution that is noteworthy is the work of our Director of Research, S. Shivaji, on the “Ocular Surface Fungal Microbiome”. This completely new information will help to understand the mechanism underlying some eye infections and to develop treatment strategies.

My compliments to Ramesh Kekunnaya, Director of our Child Sight Institute for his appointment as a member on the Editorial Board of the Journal “Current Eye Research”.

Every effort, in every functional arm of our Institute, ultimately gravitates towards making a difference to the visually impaired or blind, often in disadvantaged situations. The story of a 40 year old woman living in a remote village in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh exemplifies this. Born deaf and mute, she was able to manage, thanks to her good vision. But her world came crashing down when she started losing her vision, much to the concern of her husband. Their relatively meager financial resources added to this worry. Fortunately, our community screening programme in these villages helped to identify her and organize for her care in the form of cataract surgery, at no cost to them. There are many such people whom we have the privilege to serve in a similar way; and the smiles on their faces make our work very rewarding.

- Gullapalli N. Rao