



February 2020 at LVPEI

As I write this, the entire world is waging a battle against a threat, the kind of which the world has never experienced before. Like every other organization, we are also getting into a new mode of life. I hope that when I write this communication next month, the world would recover at least partially from the onslaught of this new plague.

For us, February had many things to smile about on many fronts.

One major headline in February was our team's involvement in the initiative to provide eye care to the Rohingya population, in one of the largest refugee settlement in the Cox's Bazar area of Bangladesh. This group constitutes one of the most marginalized populations of the world. Dr. Srinivas Marmamula, one of our optometrists and public health expert, led the clinical team from six countries including a team of five optometrists from our institute. The initiative was supported by the One Sight Foundation of the US and a local partner, BRAC (the biggest NGO in Bangladesh and one of the biggest in the world). Over 7000 people were pre-screened in the refugee camps and adjoining local community, Kutupalong, by community workers using our BEST protocol developed at LVPEI. The clinical team examined close to 1800 people in five days and provided eye care including spectacles. This was conducted under one of the toughest and volatile conditions with access to limited resources. Here is what Srinivas had to say of the experience.

"Working in these low-resource makeshift camps located in such difficult terrain was indeed a challenge. But equally rewarding was to see the joy on their faces on being able to see the world better after wearing the glasses for the first time. Language seemed no barrier and emotions ran high and our days of tiredness just got washed away in those grateful smiles that we witnessed every day".

As always, a large contingent from our Institute participated in the annual meeting of the All India Ophthalmological Society in Gurugram. Several presentations were made, some moderated and few others chaired scientific sessions. Many of our colleagues received honours; Dr. Somasheila Murthy was elected as a member of the scientific committee.

Several others also received honours, outside the above meeting. Dr. Sujata Das received the Doctor of Science honoris causa from the Ravenshaw University of Cuttack in Odisha. Swathi Kaliki was invited on to the editorial board of the journal "Clinical and Experimental Ophthalmology" as Section Editor-Ocular Oncology. Some of our colleagues and doctoral students received international travel grants to present their work at international meetings.

My compliments to each of the recipients of the honours.

Our Rehabilitation group organized a meeting involving several non-governmental organizations working in the field of disabilities in Odisha to plan and enhance the scope and

impact of vision rehabilitation services in the state. There is huge gap between the demand and supply of these services in Odisha, as is seen in the rest of India.

A few months ago, I have conveyed our deep sense of loss at the demise of our long term artist in residence, Surya Prakash. As a tribute to Surya, we have organized a week long artists' workshop. Several well-known and promising artistes from across India participated and created works of beauty. These art works now adorn the wall of Surya Prakash gallery and other areas of the buildings. A few of our colleagues jumped in enthusiastically and gave shape to their hidden talents.

The 184th vision centre, supported by Standard Chartered, was inaugurated at Maheswaram village of Ranga Reddy district in Telangana state. This is linked to our secondary centre in Kothur in the same district, the NATCO Eye Centre.

Our tertiary centre in Vijayawada, the Kode Venkatadri Chowdary campus, had its anniversary during this month. Four secondary and nine vision centres also had their anniversaries this month.

Even while the threat caused by corona virus is of extreme worry, we could bring a smile on the face of a 111 year old man in Liberia through a cataract surgery that restored his sight. He said "For a man from the early part of the previous century, you have provided me the most advanced treatment here, in my own country." He thanked the team profusely.

A global cooperation on a much greater scale with visionary global leadership is now required to combat the threat of corona virus- the biggest health care challenge of our times.

I wish you all well. Stay safe.

- Gullapalli N Rao