



March 2020 at LVPEI

The entire world is currently preoccupied with one threat – the threat to one's life! This novel microbe has already dealt a devastating blow to many countries in the world with near total cessation of normal activity in the rest. Sadly, this new plague has become the equalizer in the world. At LVPEI too, we were no different, preparing for this challenge and eventually suspending most activities barring emergency services. The fundamental objective was to make sure that our patients and staff get the utmost protection against the risk of this infection. The entire planning was made and implemented to this end. All the patient care services were limited to emergency cases. The entire team was vertically split into three groups covering all cadres, with each group providing service for two days a week. All the members of the staff belonging to high risk categories were asked to work from home entirely. Similarly all stipulated guidelines were followed for the handling of the patients.

An area of concern for many in such a situation is job security. I am happy that our Institute has given assurance to every member of the team concerning this with protection of their entire salary.

In addition, our Institute has contributed to the safety of professionals by developing a low cost, easy to manufacture indigenous protective face mask (a visor). This was designed by one of the young engineers in collaboration with ophthalmologists working in our Centre for Technology Innovation. We then released the invention as an open source. This device is now manufactured by multiple vendors in India and other countries, and has benefitted thousands of health care, police and other front line workers in the combat against this deadly virus.

Our Rehabilitation group started a call centre to help people with disabilities who need greater care and assistance during this time. This is helping scores of such individuals.

To support the government in its efforts to contain this disease, we have offered our facilities for quarantine purpose, should such an eventuality arise.

One area that rose to the occasion to provide necessary service to our patients was the Tele Ophthalmology service through which we have been able to serve hundreds of our patients each day across our network. Numerous patient and public education messages were circulated by our communications team.

During this month, several of our colleagues received honours, but one that deserves special mention is the outstanding service award received by Jyothi. Jyothi is our field assistant who works in our Paloncha secondary centre area, which is one of the toughest geographic terrains. The State Government recognized her for her services to the tribals in that district through community based rehabilitation and bestowed this honour.

Rohit Khanna has been selected as a recipient of the “APAO Outstanding Service in Prevention of Blindness Award 2020” from Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology. Srinivas Marmamula was honoured with the “Optometry Council of India Essilor award 2019.

Prerna Kulshrestha received the Senior Research Fellowship Award from the Indian Council of Medical Research. Congratulations to all of them!

Even through these difficult times, certain services continued unabated because of their critical nature. One such is the surveillance and care of premature children with Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP). Timely recognition and appropriate intervention prevents a life time of vision loss in these children.

We have kept a watch on the developments in another country thousands of miles away. Our programme in Liberia is affected too. From the reports we have, that country appears to be better prepared from the experience they had with Ebola crisis a few years ago. Yet there were a few examples that brought cheer.

Maron Davis, Jacob Jarboi and Linda Nador are school dropouts in Liberia, aged between 11 and 20 years. They had problems with their eye sight, but did not seek help due to lack of awareness about eye care and the benefits of wearing glasses. But today, things are different. A simple pair of glasses has made all the difference, and all of them are able to see clearly again. There are many more like them whose lives have been positively impacted at our Liberia Eye Centre, through these relatively simple interventions in the middle of this global turmoil.

- Gullapalli N Rao