



## **April 2020 at LVPEI**

April 2020 will go down as the “month of transition from the pre-COVID to the post-COVID era” of our activity. Most of our efforts went into this preparation during the month.

Research has always been a significant component of our Institute’s activities. The commitment made right at the time of inception yielded rich dividends in the form of a thriving research environment and productivity. The leadership provided by Prof. Balasubramanian (Balu) as the first Director of Research was pivotal in laying a strong foundation. He nurtured it with care and that has made a big difference. His stature in Indian Science has also been a major advantage. He was succeeded by Dr. Shivaji, a renowned experimental microbiologist. During his just concluded tenure, we have seen significant growth and addition of newer dimensions to our research. We are indebted to both of them.

Starting April 1, we have a new Director of Research, someone whose background is entirely different from his predecessors. While the former two are basic scientists, our new Director, Dr. Sayan Basu is a clinician-scientist. Following his residency from Kolkata, Sayan did a Cornea fellowship with us and was recruited to our faculty subsequently. This brilliant young man developed a passion for research, and got involved in work related to stem cell transplantation of ocular surface. He then spent a year with Prof. James Funderburgh at the University of Pittsburgh where he began to blaze new trails in stem cell research. Sayan has been very productive; he is an original thinker and a superb translational researcher. In recognition of all his achievements and leadership qualities, he was chosen for this position. Sayan has a challenging role ahead, as he has to now navigate in the new post-COVID world. Our Institute has a solid record in research, on which he has to build on. Our group had 395 peer reviewed publications during the year of April 2019-March 31, 2020, an indication of the culture of publication among all our faculty. We wish Sayan a very successful tenure.

Our main focus during the month was on preparations to resume all our activities in the post-COVID period. Intensive plans were developed, SOPs were created to ensure safety of patients and staff, all cadres of staff were given appropriate training online, and a calendar was finalized. The lockdown period has provided opportunities to clear the backlog, increase productivity in areas such as education and research, and make bigger contributions in these areas. Hundreds of lectures were prepared for professional education, and online teaching was conducted to most cadres of staff. There was also an opportunity to streamline many of the activities.

The low cost Visor (full protective gear for face) developed by our technology group was provided to all our staff, in addition to several other hospitals and front line workers like the police. Multiple donors contributed to this project and we are grateful for their gesture.

Our teams in our rural network of secondary and primary care vision centres reached out to thousands of our patients offering support for any distress in their families. A few hundred families who went into a situation of financial distress were supported by voluntary contributions by staff in those centres - indeed a heart-warming gesture! As we are now part of those rural communities, our staff felt that it is our responsibility to help in alleviating any hardship in those communities.

Our Rehabilitation group continued their activities online with various forms of support to our clients. They have also helped those in financial distress by identifying donors who provided funding for these families. Over 200 families were touched through this mechanism. These gestures of our teams in our rural network and the rehabilitation group made us proud.

Congratulations are due to Ponnari Gottipati, Rashmi Krishna Murthy and Bhavani Kowtharapu, who received awards from different organizations.

The story of Baby Anvitha, who successfully travelled from Kerala amidst lockdown for her cycle of chemotherapy is heart-warming. Baby Anvitha is over one year old and suffers from Retinoblastoma, a life-threatening eye cancer. She has been receiving chemotherapy at our Institute, free of cost to her parents. It is critical for these patients to undergo their chemo cycles on schedule for a successful treatment outcome. Her worried parents posted their plight on Facebook and requested help. In a moving gesture, the Chief Minister and Health Minister of Kerala responded promptly and made all arrangements for their visit to our Institute. Appreciating the commitment of her parents and support from different groups, Dr. Swathi Kaliki, who is treating this child comments “It is highly commendable how various individuals, organizations and several state governments came together to help Anvitha and her family.” Anvitha is recovering well under the able care of Dr. Kaliki with good chances that both her eyes and sight will be saved.

- Gullapalli N Rao