



## **December 2020 and the Year 2020 at LVPEI**

What a momentous year 2020 turned out to be and how different from what it was planned to be!

For us at the LV Prasad Eye Institute it has left behind an indelible impression in many ways. It was a test for our resilience, commitment and sense of purpose; and in all these, we have come out unscathed. The challenges thrown by the global pandemic taught us several lessons, provided us many experiences and made us even more innovative. Together all these prepared us for an even brighter future. We are very grateful for all the blessings and support we continue to receive that helped us to build this strength since our foundation. This has given us the ability to perform against all odds without deviating from our purpose.

2020 was supposed to be a year of great celebration for those in the global eye care community with the conclusion of the “VISION 2020: The Right to Sight” programme, a global initiative to eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020. Our Institute played a leadership role in this global programme at all levels - global, national and state levels. While a celebratory event was not possible, the outstanding and globally acclaimed contributions made by our Institute and our team members, in controlling the scourge of blindness, is indeed a cause for celebration.

During the year, we have set up systems for the protection of everyone that entered any of our campuses from the Vision Centres in the remotest rural areas to the Kallam Anji Reddy Campus in Hyderabad. We were fortunate that these systems provided protection for our team, patients and visitors. This indeed is a cause for celebration.

There was a question about security of our incomes and jobs. The systems we have created and strengthened over the years have provided this much needed assurance and relief. This helped all of us to focus on our duties at hand; and to the credit of everyone we have delivered in the safest possible way without ever compromising our standards or values.

While there was concern about the drop in patient volumes in the earlier months, our adherence to the fundamentals has helped to regain the volumes. There was a significant financial strain in the initial months that was relieved in the later months. We are now again on our course of stability and growth.

During the year, we continued to grow with inauguration of new programmes and centres, and addition of facilities and activities, thanks to the continuing flow of support from our friends around the world who believe in us.

We have always been proud of what we are doing in the remotest rural and tribal areas – giving high quality primary eye care through permanent facilities to these neglected populations who need the care most. Our “Vision Centre model” that we conceptualized, implemented and scaled up is now accepted world over and is being replicated.

Our 200<sup>th</sup> Vision Centre was inaugurated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of this month in Doultabad, Siddipet district of Telangana state. With this, we have now created a gateway for high quality comprehensive eye care directly to ONE CRORE people living in difficult circumstances. This pioneering model of primary eye care is being replicated elsewhere in India and in many other countries. This is again a big cause for celebration.

Our Eye Banking network continued its excellent performance harvesting 4708 corneas even under the challenging conditions. This represented around 40 percent of the total corneas harvested in the country. My compliments to our eye banking team for their superior performance.

In 2020, the productivity of our research group increased resulting in 539 peer-reviewed publications. We are pleased that nearly 90 percent of our clinical faculty had a record of publications and the time away from work place was put to best use by our faculty.

“Education” is another area that had an outstanding performance in a difficult year. While most organisations in the world struggled in this area, our teams have proved this to be a great opportunity to innovate and that made all the difference. Several webinars, in house teaching, production of education materials, and videos helped more than 10000 eye care professionals around the world. The growth of Digital Education programmes accelerated.

The impact of our education programmes is well expressed in the words of Dr. Vinay A Shah, an alumnus, who has been awarded the ‘Thelma Gaylord Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology’ at the Dean McGee Eye Institute and the University of Oklahoma, USA. This is what he has to say: "Without a doubt between my fellowships, residencies and all the other training that I received in India and the USA, the one that has impacted me the most and has shaped me into the ophthalmologist and physician that I am today, is my LVPEI experience! Thank you for all that you have done for me, and for all the other countless trainees whose lives have been changed after being part of the LVPEI family."

External recognition came in a variety of forms in unexpected ways for the Institute and individuals.

The “Sanford and Susan Greenberg End Blindness 2020 Prize”, that we have received this month, was the recognition for the years of hard work by everyone in our group in conceptualizing, building, growing, refining and making an impact on needless blindness locally, nationally and globally. Our impact was both directly through our services and even more indirectly through our education, research, capacity building, innovation, eye banking, advocacy, planning and formulation of policies. We felt honoured by the recognition for our contribution to the global effort to end blindness.

The “Best Rehabilitation Institute” award to our Institute for Rehabilitation was yet another recognition. This is richly deserved as our Rehabilitation team has done outstanding work consistently over the years encompassing all areas from the community based programmes in remote rural communities to cutting edge centre based interventions at the tertiary centres, and extending into care of other associated disabilities. The hundreds of thousands of individuals touched by these efforts bear testimony to this dedicated work.

As for individuals, there were many laurels. Among these were the Vision Excellence Awards to four members of our team by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). This was in recognition of their vision, drive, commitment and quality of

work to eradicate needless blindness and their outstanding contributions to the VISION 2020: The Right to Sight initiative.

The other was the numerous coveted honours to Javed Ali including the Lester T Jones Surgical Anatomy Award, American Academy of Ophthalmology – American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

Each of the above is a cause for celebration in itself.

While we have sailed through the year relatively unscathed, we have lost one of our colleagues to Covid and few other colleagues have lost their near and dear ones. We convey our deepest condolences to these families. I hope that even in grief, these families have many moments in the lives of their departed ones to celebrate.

Our good fortune, I believe, is because of the blessings of millions whom we had the privilege to serve. To all of them and to the scores of supporters around the world who always stand by us, I place on record our indebtedness.

The New Year has begun with renewed hope, vigour and optimism for an even brighter future.

- Gullapalli N. Rao