



January 2021 at LVPEI

One of the annual highlights of our research activity is the “Champalimaud Research Symposium”. This event held on the 31st of January was spectacular with a galaxy of speakers. The Annual Champalimaud Oration was delivered by Dr. Paul Sieving, Professor of Ophthalmology and holds an Endowed Chair at the University of California, Davis Eye Center, and former Director of the National Eye Institute (NEI) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), USA. He spoke on “Human ocular gene therapy and X-linked retinoschisis”. Other prominent speakers were eminent people from different disciplines. These included the famous infectious disease and vaccine expert, Dr. Shekhar Mande, Director General, Council for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), India; Dr. Debajyoti Chakraborty, Institute of Genomics & Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB, New Delhi), Prof. Gagandeep Kang of Christian Medical College, Vellore; Prof. Pradeep Ramulu of Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins University; Prof. Sobha Sivaprasad of Moorfields Eye Hospital, London; Prof. Brigitte Roeder, University of Hamburg, Germany; and Dr. Kapil Bharti, NEI, NIH, USA.

The President, Dr. Leonor Beleza spoke of the strong partnership between our organizations and the progress made at the Champalimaud Foundation during the past year. Gullapalli N Rao welcomed the participants and shared LVPEI’s response to the global pandemic and how it coped with the situation. He also shared the highlights of other activities during the year.

One of the recent developments was the decision to develop a cluster of smaller, boutique centres in different parts of the city providing most of the essential services. Named “City Centres”, these will eliminate the need for many patients to travel to the main campus as well as help in decongesting the campus, which is a relevant and necessary change in the present conditions. A new centre was inaugurated in Alwal on the outskirts of Hyderabad in a leased premises. We gratefully acknowledge the generous grant from Sai Life Sciences Pvt. Ltd, one of the regular supporters of the Institute, for the equipment in the centre. Mrs. Sudha and Mr. Krishna Kanumuri, who head this group, did the honours. This is the third city centre in Hyderabad.

As we add new centres, we celebrate the anniversaries of the existing ones. This month our Mithu Tulsi Chanrai campus in Bhubaneswar celebrated its sixteenth Foundation Day. The campus has grown into a major resource centre for eye care in the eastern part of India and is one of the leading eye centres in the country.

Kode Venkatadri Chowdary campus in Vijayawada inaugurated its services for specialized scleral contact lenses for some of the refractory corneal problems. This much needed service is now available in central Andhra Pradesh. The lenses are manufactured by our Institute in Hyderabad with a special license from Boston Foundation for Sight, USA.

As the vaccines against COVID-19 were rolled out for health care workers in India, the first dose was given to our teams in most of our campuses across the network. We are happy that this offers yet another layer of protection against this infection as our team members interact with many patients, families and visitors.

Prof. Balasubramanian was inducted as the Fellow of the ARVO (Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology); Raja Narayanan and Sayan Basu were invited to editorial boards of prestigious journals; and several of our doctoral students received fellowships with honours. Congratulations to all of them!

Throughout the month, our Education Academy, Research centre, Rehabilitation centre, and the teams in all other areas continued their activities unabated. The month also registered a further increase in volumes across all campuses and centres. A welcome development was the steady increase in our non-paying patient volumes, which was interrupted significantly during the past year.

The sad news for us this month is the loss of a great friend. Frederick N Griffith was the Founder of Tissue Banks International and The International Federation of Eye Banks. He was one of the few in the world who believed in us in our earlier years and took the risk of supporting us to get into eye banking. Without his unwavering support at that stage, our Ramayamma International Eye Bank would not have achieved its current success. His wife, Bea, was always with him in this journey. He will always be remembered for his invaluable contribution to the modern eye banking system, and his passion for eradicating corneal blindness. In his passing, we lost a great friend, supporter and believer in what we stand for.

'Silver Sight Initiative turned out to be a silver lining on the dark cloud for our family', says a grateful Mr. Chiranjeevi, son of 66-year old Mrs. Aakaarapu Padma. Mrs. Padma received sight-restoring treatment after two long years of visual impairment. Her son, a school teacher in a rural area, could not afford the treatment for her complicated problem with cataract and retinal detachment; and the lockdown made it even more difficult. Our team reached out to her at her home, helped her through the different levels of care and advanced treatment required for her condition. LVPEI's Silver Sight-Eye Care for the Elderly program, reaches out to the most vulnerable groups in the remote rural locations, giving them a new lease of life and independence.

- Gullapalli N. Rao