



February 2021 at LVPEI

Eye Banking is an area where we have always been proud of our team's accomplishments. This month, our team reached the "50000+" mark of providing corneas for transplants across the country. Out of these, 38,655 transplants were performed at our Institute. Even during this past year of pandemic, our eye bank distributed corneas for over 40 percent of the transplants performed across the country. I congratulate our entire eye banking team for this superlative performance against all odds. This would not have been possible without the support of many friends who helped to make this a reality in a country where organ transplantation was considered almost impossible. Our capacity building support to the external institutions, with whom we are working in this area, has begun to yield useful results. One such is the eye bank we helped develop at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, in Rishikesh in the state of Uttarakhand, which has already harvested 194 corneas in two years.

February was also the month when we have returned to pre-covid volumes in patient care and even exceeded in many centres across our network. The biggest gain was in our rural secondary centres and primary care vision centres with 120 to 160 percent of pre-covid volumes. The Tele-consultation system has taken a firm root now and the novel addition of home care is continuing to expand. Another welcome development was the increase in volumes of our non-paying patients.

The revenue from our paying patients matched this trend and the income from sales of optical business set a new record. The continuing flow of philanthropic support for new projects and for the expansion of the existing ones is another positive trend. Part of the support was given towards the care of the economically underprivileged. One such this month was a substantial contribution from the Raisaheb Pannalalji Hiralalji Lahoti Trust, for the upgradation of one of our city centres in Hyderabad. The formal launch had Mr. Syed Akbaruddin, Former India's Permanent Representative at the United Nations as Chief Guest, and was attended by the members of Lahoti family headed by Sri Suresh Chandra Lahoti. We are grateful to the family for including us in their philanthropic giving.

I have shared earlier about the new generation of "technology enabled vision centres" where multiple technological devices from our innovation group were introduced, thanks to the initial generous grant from Standard Chartered Bank. While this support was for the development of new generation vision centres, funding from Lavelle Fund of New York is helping us to upgrade the existing centres that Lavelle Fund initially supported. A new development is the philanthropic support of individuals from these villages. This new trend was started by Prof K Ravindranath, Former Dean, SV Veterinary University, Tirupathi (formerly AP Agricultural University, Hyderabad), when he funded the upgradation of two vision centres close to his native village in Guntur district. We are grateful for this support that sets a new direction and augurs well for the future of eye care in underserved areas.

This month, our tertiary care centre (Kode Venkatadri Chowdary campus) in Vijayawada celebrated its tenth anniversary. This celebration was full of gaiety as this was the first get-together of the group after almost a year. Much progress happened at this centre with the steady growth and addition of new sub-speciality services along the way. It has now become a major resource for tertiary care and education in central Andhra Pradesh.

The education activities at the Standard Chartered-LVPEI Academy continued unabated. The highlight was a workshop on “Research Methodology and Biostatistics” organised by Jefferson University and Wills Eye Institute of Philadelphia, with active collaboration and contribution of our faculty from all the groups. Nineteen training sessions covering over 900 participants on various topics were conducted during the month. The Institute for Rehabilitation had a special orientation session to promote inclusive work environment that included both employers and youth with disabilities.

Our worldwide alumni network is an extension of our Institute. At the first ever virtual meet, over 200 alumni participated. Professor Virander Chauhan, one of India’s most distinguished scientists and educationists was the Guest of Honour. Being a world authority on vaccines, he was invited to speak on “COVID-19 and Vaccines”. His scintillating lecture captivated the entire group. The group had a wonderful opportunity to share their journeys and how they reached where they are.

The research output continued to be high with peer reviewed publications in large numbers, indicative of how productively our clinical and scientific faculty spent their time from home.

I will conclude with the story of a happy patient. Mr. Boppana Ranadhir is a 75 yrs old man, who resides in a remote village close to our primary care vision centre in Kampli, Ballari district of Karnataka. When he heard about the free eye care services offered here, he and his wife came for an evaluation, and they were advised cataract surgery. Both were operated at our secondary centre in Ballari with successful visual outcome. Delighted with his restored vision, Mr. Ranadhir became the self-proclaimed ambassador of our services and regularly referred others in his village to our centre. When our team visited his village recently, he welcomed them warmly and actively participated in all activities, including awareness programmes, door to door screening, counselling in local languages and referrals. This kind of response and enthusiasm from a happy patient more than compensates our efforts to take care to those who need it most!

- Gullapalli N. Rao