



January 2022 at LVPEI

As the clock strikes 12:00 midnight on 31st December each year, the world lights up with hope and optimism as we look forward to the start of a new year. This year, I would think we had all hoped for the end of the pandemic. However, in India this hope was short-lived, as the country was gripped by the third wave of the pandemic. Despite facing extreme hardship, the team at LVPEI made every effort to ensure continuity of our services and implementation of all plans. I would like to begin this newsletter by complimenting everyone in our team for standing together during these trying times and putting in practice the true values of the organisation.

We began the year with the launch of the Institute of Excellence and Global Resource Centre for Retinal Diseases – The Anant Bajaj Retina Institute. This initiative is part of our vision to create institutes of excellence in different areas of eye care, each one focusing on a major cause of vision loss. Led by Raja Narayanan, the Anant Bajaj Retina Institute will focus on all aspects of retinal diseases and enhance access to high quality retina care. The institute will provide excellent and equitable clinical care, and through training ophthalmologists and eye care personnel, build the capacity of other eye care organisations at national and international levels to do the same. It will also promote and enhance research capacity on retinal diseases in India and other developing countries. It will work to scale up community eye health programs and utilize technology to provide better care for those with retinal diseases. The Bajaj Group, one of India's renowned corporate houses, are supporting this initiative in the memory of their late Managing Director, Anant Bajaj. At the launch, Mr Shekhar Bajaj, Chairman and Managing Director of Bajaj Electricals Limited, and Anant Bajaj's father said, "Anant's dream was to combine cutting-edge technology with philanthropy to make a difference in the lives of people. With the launch of the Anant Bajaj Retina Institute, his vision of an India with better eye health will come true." We would like to thank Mr Shekhar and Mrs Kiran Bajaj, Ms Pooja Bajaj and the entire Bajaj family for joining LVPEI in its mission to eliminate needless vision loss.

The inauguration of Ophthalmic Research Bio-Repository facility at the Kallam Anji Reddy campus in Hyderabad through the generosity of Prof Krothapalli Ravindranath was another cause for celebration this month. We now also have a state-of-the-art operating room complex supported by the National Thermal Power Corporation; and a digital audio library and special needs vision clinic both supported by Columbus Global Services India Pvt Ltd at our Mithu Tulsi Chanrai (MTC) Campus in Bhubaneswar. On the rural and community eye health front, we inaugurated three new vision centres in the Ganjam District, Odisha with support from Mission for Vision and Wen Giving Foundation. I want to express our gratitude to each of these organisations for their support to our mission.

Each year in January we celebrate the foundation day of our MTC campus by hosting the annual Bijayananda Patnaik Memorial Lecture. This year the 12th Bijayananda Patnaik Memorial Lecture was delivered by Dr Ajay Parida, Director of the Institute of Life Sciences and an elected fellow of the National Academy of Science and National Academy of Agriculture Science. Dr Parida has done pioneering work in the application of science and technology for rural development. He is actively working with grassroots organisations and local communities in identifying issues affecting food and livelihood security, and providing solutions based on participatory approaches. His work was recognised by the Government of India with the civilian honour, Padma Shri. I would like to thank Dr Parida for sharing his experiences with us. My thanks are also due to Dr Rajinder Kalsi Patnaik and the members of the Patnaik family for agreeing to make this named lecture an integral part of the foundation day celebrations of our MTC campus.



A new batch of ophthalmologists started fellowship training this month, including three international trainees from Mexico, Ethiopia and Bhutan. I welcome this new batch and wish them a very productive fellowship with us.

The Standard Chartered LVPEI Academy for Eye Care Education conducted 14 webinars as part of CME programs benefitting 1131 participants. The Ocular Surface Workshop that has been held annually over the years has become the most sought-after CME for clinicians and scientists in this field. My appreciation to the entire ocular surface team for creating this unique program and continuing to play a leadership role.

January also saw several of our faculty members receiving honours and awards. Premnandhini Satgunam was selected for the prestigious 2022 Pfizer Ophthalmics Carl Camras Translational Research Award of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) Foundation for Eye Research. She is the first Indian ever to receive this honour. The award is in recognition of her innovative work in the development of Paediatric Perimeter. Rebecca Sumalini and Goutham Pyatla received the ARVO Developing Country Eye Researcher Fellowship Award 2022. Swapna Shanbhag received the Sunkalp Award from SUN Pharma for her work on ocular sequelae of Stevens Johnson syndrome and chemical burns – two of the most challenging and important causes of blindness in India and many developing countries. Muralidhar Ramappa received triple recognition for his work at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology in November 2021 - Best of the Show Award, Best Poster Award and the Top Rated Instruction Course. My heartiest congratulations to all the awardees.

As I close, let me share a sequel to three-year-old Harshini's story. I had last written about her to you in my November newsletter. Our vision centre in the tiny hamlet of Karempudi had first flagged a tell-tale white reflex in this little girl's eye. She was directed to our tertiary centre in Vijayawada, where she was diagnosed with retinoblastoma – a rare eye cancer in her right eye. The doctors recommended to remove her eye to save her life. This news devastated Manthru, Harshini's father. Manthru drove an auto-rickshaw for a living. He had lost a child earlier, and yet, to permit a surgery that would make Harshini blind in one eye was too much for him. LVPEI's team made every effort to convince him of the urgency and risk to her life but he took Harshini away and switched his phone off. The LVPEI team did not give up. They reached out to Manthru's hamlet in rural Guntur and spoke to the village head, to Manthru's cousin, and his wife. They showed them pictures, posters and left behind reading material on this cancer. Finally, the head of our Operation Eye Universal Institute for Eye Cancer, Dr Swathi Kaliki, reached out to Manthru and assured him all support, with the best treatment provided at no cost. After much persuasion, Manthru visited our Hyderabad campus and consented for Harshini's eye removal surgery; an incredibly brave and difficult decision for him to make. Little Harshini is doing well post-surgery and will soon start chemotherapy sessions for reducing the risk of spread of the tumor. Thanks to the support of the local community and the coordinated efforts of the entire team--from Prameela, our vision technician in Karempudi, to Swathi Kaliki, our Head of Oncology--we could provide timely treatment and save her life. This is a demonstration of the positive impact of the LVPEI Eye Health Pyramid. Integrated patient-centered care saves lives, not just sight.

- Prashant Garg