

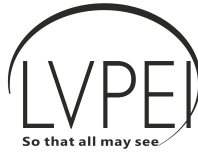
February 2022 at LVPEI

The LVPEI network celebrated the 11th anniversary of our Kode Venkatadri Chowdary (KVC) Campus in Vijayawada--our youngest tertiary care centre--on 16th February. Let me begin this month's newsletter by congratulating the entire team there and wishing them the very best as they step into their second decade. In its first decade, the KVC campus provided outpatient services to nearly 800,000 individuals; performed 80,000 surgical procedures; delivered rehabilitation services to 27,000 clients; and trained more than 800 eye care professionals. The campus is also gearing up for its next phase of growth. Soon it will have 8 more clinical examination rooms, one additional operating room, and a dedicated, state-of-the-art contact lens service. In addition, the team is all set to create dedicated myopia and elderly eye care centres. Under the leadership of a young and dynamic leader, Anasua Ganguly, and a fully committed team, I am confident that the campus will attain greater heights. The KVC campus is steadfast in its endeavor to provide quality eye care and to eliminate needless vision impairment and blindness in the region.

February also saw us celebrating our cherished partnership with the Champalimaud Foundation. The Foundation, based in Lisbon, Portugal, was created on the bequest of the late Portuguese industrialist and entrepreneur, António de Sommer Champalimaud. It has a long-term commitment to support medical research, in particular neurology, oncology and the vision sciences. Their partnership with LVPEI started in 2007 with creation of the Champalimaud Translational Centre of Eye Research (C TRACER) and has only become stronger over time. Every year, we conduct a symposium and present new developments in the eye and vision sciences to commemorate our partnership. The 14th Annual Champalimaud Symposium was held on February 6th. The day's highlight was the 'Champalimaud oration' by Dr. Micheal F Chiang, Director of the National Eye Institute, USA. Dr Chiang discussed the role of artificial intelligence and machine learning in clinical medicine. Dr. Friedrich Paulsen, Professor and Head, Institute of Functional and Clinical Anatomy at the Friedrich Alexander University, Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany shared his research on 'Physiology of tear drainage into nose. Dr Venkata VK Venuganti of Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Hyderabad presented his work on Microneedles as an alternative to syringe needles for ophthalmic drug delivery.

I am delighted to share a major LVPEI Research achievement: the award of the Sree RamKrishna Parahamsa Research Grant to our team led by Dr Sayan Basu, director of the Brien Holden Eye Research Centre. The award is instituted by the Sree Padmavathi Venkateswara Foundation and is given each year to a pathbreaking translational research project in the medical and health sciences. This year's winning team includes basic scientists, biomaterial experts as well as clinician scientists from the Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), and LVPEI. Their project will evaluate the safety and efficacy of a novel and proprietary biomimetic hydrogel (a scaffold-like material) along with unique mesenchymal stem cells derived from the human eye for the treatment of corneal wounds. This cutting-edge technology promises to be a simpler alternative to corneal transplantation and offers hope to millions of individuals with an opaque cornea, a major cause of blindness in the developing world. Do join me in congratulating the entire team.

Joveeta Joseph was elected Associate Editor to the editorial board of 'Frontiers in Immunology'. Muralidhar Ramappa was felicitated with the 'Vaidya Ratna' award by the Mother Teresa Foundation for his dedicated services toward children suffering with corneal diseases. My congratulations to both for their well-deserved honours.



The institute of Vision Rehabilitation continues to expand the scope of its activities. For some time now, the team at IVR has been focussing on the vision needs of children with “special needs”. ‘Special needs’ is an umbrella term used for an array of diagnoses including children with developmental delays, medical issues, psychiatric disorders, and congenital conditions. Such children require specific interventions to help them reach their potential. In February, the IVR team started two more clinics for children with special needs at our KVC campus in Vijayawada and at our GMR Varalakshmi campus in Visakhapatnam. Kudos to Beula’s leadership and the committed team at IVR for their wonderful work.

This month, the LVPEI eye bank network collected 934 corneas and distributed 744 corneas for transplantation surgeries. The eye banks serviced those across the LVPEI network as well as other surgeons across the country. Nearly 40% of India’s corneal distribution is sourced from the LVPEI eye bank network.

The Gullapalli Pratibha Rao International Centre for Advancement of Rural Eye Care (GPRICARE) inaugurated four new vision centres in Odisha, two in Keonjhar district and one each in Rayagada and Koraput districts. These vision centres are part of grants instituted by the Standard Chartered Bank, Mission for Vision and Wen Giving Foundation. We are thankful for their support in taking eye care to some of India’s most under-served communities.

I would like to end this newsletter with Sandhya’s story. In 2008, eighteen-year-old Sandhya abruptly lost her vision to Optic Atrophy. The sudden vision loss shook her confidence. Sandhya stopped going to college, and she restricted herself in many aspects of life. In 2011, she was referred to the Institute for Vision Rehabilitation. With counselling and support, Sandhya learnt to live independently. She now had access to audiobooks produced by the Digital Library Services. With help, Sandhya steadily reclaimed her education and went on to finish her Masters in Telugu from Osmania University. As her confidence grew, so did her ambition. Sandhya decided to tackle the National Eligibility Test that would let her apply for a PhD. It gives me much pleasure to share that not only did Sandhya crack the NET but also qualified for a Junior Research Fellowship. What does Sandhya want next? A Sahitya Academy award from the Governor of Telangana. That’s the thing about excellence: it unlocks potential, even for those who can’t see this truth in themselves.

- Prashant Garg