



March 2022 at LVPEI

For an Indian organization the month of March is important as it is the last month of the financial year. I am happy to note that LVPEI has closed the financial year on a positive note. This financial milestone also coincided with our entry into primary eye care thirty years ago. Our journey began in 1992 with the inauguration of the first Vision Centre (primary eye care centre), the VST Vision Centre at Ramnagar in Hyderabad, Telangana. The centre continues to provide primary care in the area to a large marginalized and poverty-ridden community. In these thirty years, LVPEI's primary care network has grown in strength to 232 Vision Centres, including 62 Futuristic Vision Centres (enhanced with technology). The presence of these permanent facilities in remote rural and tribal areas covering a 50,000 population each has brought good quality eye care closer to the doorstep of millions. This network is addressing over 70% of avoidable vision loss with spectacles as well as helping in the early detection of potentially blinding conditions.

The Institute of Vision Rehabilitation continues to pioneer unique ways to support clients with vision impairment. In March, they conducted an art workshop for children with vision impairment. The art & craft at the workshop included pot painting and tactile greeting cards. A group of 13 children assisted by five sighted volunteers participated in the workshop. All of them enjoyed the creative process as they seldom get such an opportunity. In addition, three of our clients who had received computer training, got job placements in the government and private sectors. My thanks to Beula's leadership for facilitating their training and helping them realize the full potential of their lives. Her efforts have brought a smile to their faces.

Like every year, we marked the week of 6 to 12 March 2022 as the "Glaucoma Awareness Week" across the network to raise awareness about this blinding disease. Glaucoma is the 'silent thief of sight'; vision once lost due to it cannot be restored. 80% of blindness from glaucoma is preventable, provided it is detected and treated in time. Yet, almost 7 million people worldwide go blind due to glaucoma, with two-thirds of them being women. This is because a whopping 90% of glaucoma cases go undetected, presumably due to a lack of awareness. Our efforts to raise awareness included a patient interaction forum, eye screening programs, awareness talks, social media campaigns and media interviews.

We also observed World Down Syndrome Day on March 21st. A team of optometrists from LVPEI participated in a vision screening program for children with Down Syndrome organized by the Fernandez Child Development Centre, in association with Down Syndrome Federation of India and Nayi Disha in Hyderabad.



Many of my colleagues received accolades this month. Our founding Chair, Nag Rao was honoured by his alma mater, the Dr R P Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, with a 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for contributions to ophthalmology and public health. Others who received recognition and awards included: Javed Ali, invited to the Editorial Board of Ophthalmic Research as Associate Editor; Subhabrata Chakrabarti, inducted as an expert panel member for Glaucoma Variant Curation Expert Panel (an initiative by the National Institutes of Health to map and curate human gene variants that have clinical relevance); Anil Mandal, honoured with the AIOS Adenwalla Award 2022; and Srinivas Marmamula, awarded the DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance Intermediate fellowship (Clinical and Public Health) for his research project on the elderly. In addition, six young research students successfully secured international travel grant support from the ARVO Foundation to attend the ARVO annual meeting that will be held in Denver, USA, in May 2022.

I would like to end this newsletter with the story of Venkat and Shourya, sons of our staff optometrist, Anjul Kumar. Like many children coping with the lockdown and the pandemic's restrictions, Anjul's young sons sorely missed school. The steady routine of a classroom was now replaced with video-classes and tons of reading material. Venkat and Shourya did not let this disruption wear them down. Turning it into an opportunity, they tooled together a website that hosts schoolwork prep and solutions. In the months since they went live, they have been steadily adding prep-notes for different classes and managed to hit 1 million page-views! The boys have achieved that rare alchemy: academic success and entrepreneurial spirit. LVPEI is full of, and is enriched by, such stories of grit and achievement.

- Prashant Garg