

A New Strategic Direction

The month of October has a special place in the LVPEI calendar. 37 years ago, on the 17th day, the foundation stone of the institute was laid down on a five-acre piece of land. It was on the outskirts of the twin cities of Hyderabad – Secunderabad at that time. Today, the institute has a physical presence in 285 locations in four states, taking on the responsibility of eyecare for nearly 2 million people—17th October is an occasion for celebration! It is also a time for reflection and charting the way forward.

This year, we marked the date of the foundation ceremony with a small event at the Kallam Anji Reddy campus at Banjara Hills, with a live video feed across our other campuses. Mr K. Padmanabhaiah, the Chairman of the Court of Governors of the Administrative Staff College of India, and former Home Secretary in the Government of India was the Chief Guest. The program began with a reflection on those early days—but Nag Rao, the founder, had a twist. He invited one of the oldest staff on to the dais with him, as he did our newest and took us down memory lane. The presence of Sri Ramesh Prasad, who published a book honouring the "unique bond" LVPEI shares with his late father, Mr. Akkineni Lakshmi Varaprasad--whose eponym we are--added poignancy to the evening.

LVPEI is an epitome of collaboration and partnership, both of individuals and organisations, built to create a world free of needless vision impairment and blindness. 17 October commemorates that spirit and partnership.

It is also a good time to think about the future: what should we commit to, to continue the journey and provide necessary acceleration?

A renewed strategic direction

That day, I spelt out my vision for such a renewed acceleration.

Our work must reflect the founding ethos of this organisation: everyone, everywhere, must have access to eye care. In India, and across the global South, we must work to make eye care affordable and accessible to everyone who needs it.

There are many eye conditions, unique to our settings, that are neither fully described, nor their management fully pursued. Our research efforts will double down on understanding such neglected conditions and offer solutions that are best suited for our peoples.

There is an acute shortage of skilled eye care personnel the world over. So, we will train, educate, and empower the several cadres of high-quality eye care professionals the sector needs.

We will seed and create Global Resource Centres from within LVPEI. These Centres will offer holistic solutions that are driven by committed and trained human resources across all our international collaborations.

Further, Technology will play a key role in resolving our ability to accelerate. However, such technology needs to be appropriate and tailored to meet our specific needs.

To set us on this path, I set out 5 strategic goals for the next five years:

- a) Our patients come first: We service nearly 2 million patients every year. Every aspect of their experience at LVPEI is ripe for improvement: our communications with them, the environment they experience, their basic

needs and comfort, the logistics of eye care, and finally, their outcomes. We will improve efficiencies and prioritise care for vulnerable groups (women, tribals, and those with disabilities). We will also prioritise emerging challenges (myopia, diabetes, and aging).

- b) Our care will step out of the clinic: LVPEI has been at the forefront of deploying teleophthalmology across the pyramidal network. We have also built a strong community/public health network in the states we operate in. Today, we are poised to offer 'Home Care', where our technicians visit people at their homes and offer basic screening services. Home Care has the objective of improving the availability, accessibility, and affordability of eye care. It will help our patients avoid unnecessary travel and the associated challenges.
- c) We will practice purposeful research: We will focus on high-impact translational research, expanding meaningful collaborations both within and outside the institute. Some of the issues I raise in this note will animate our research group: what are the regionally relevant areas of fundamental and clinical research? We will also explore the science of "big data" and mine it for meaningful insights to better understand disease progression and cure.
- d) We will share what we learn: We are creating 'Institutes of Excellence' within LVPEI. They will act as global resource centres, helping other regions and nations in replicating LVPEI models and experience in clinical care, community care, rehabilitation, eye banking, and other functions.
- e) Technology transformation: Efficiencies in care delivery and the hospital process are made possible by technology. There are new efficiencies in solar-sourced power, in building key equipment and parts locally, and in planning for a changing climate. The world is bubbling with new ideas and fresh approaches to many of our problems. LVPEI will be open and curious, and will adapt to the change around us.

This five-year strategic plan aligns with the very purpose of our organisation and our original vision and mission. In the coming months, I will work with my team to create execution plans and metrics to measure progress and outcomes. 2024 will be the first year for this plan.

No leader, strategy, or organisation can succeed without the support of many teams. LVPEI is very fortunate to have the support of an extraordinary staff all through its journey. We are two years into the leadership change at LVPEI, and as the head of the senior leadership team, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the unconditional support our staff have provided us.

That evening of the 17th, we felicitated Charan, the Vision Technician who helped save baby Varun's eyes—I had written to you before of this baby from a small village in Nagarkurnool. Charan screened the baby at our vision centre, sent images of the baby's eyes to the command centre for a consult, and finally ensured referral to the secondary centre. In that experience - training, technology, and the LVPEI promise came together to save a child's sight. I look forward to accelerating the LVPEI promise and bringing it to the millions who can benefit from our care.

-Prashant Garg