

Inspiration

A few weeks ago, during the 13th anniversary celebration of the Kode Venkatadri Chowdary (KVC) campus in Vijayawada, Jema Hembram, an ophthalmic nursing assistant (ONA) received a special recognition: the “Pride of KVC” award. Jema has a demanding schedule in the operating theatre, and yet, she never hesitates to help her colleagues with some extra time when there is pressure on the system. Jema is punctual and her dedication to care is unwavering.

Jema's journey began in a small village in Jharkhand, where her nomadic parents moved around all the time in search of a livelihood. Jema's was a family of five siblings: an older brother, two younger brothers, and a younger sister. When Jema was two years old, her father succumbed to tuberculosis. Alone, her mother faced immense challenges in raising her five children. To make ends meet, the eldest son stopped going to school and began to farm and sell vegetables. Despite their mother's best efforts to support Jema and her younger siblings' education, circumstances pushed Jema to discontinue school and return home. The Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS) then extended a helping hand, motivating Jema to pursue an Ophthalmic Nursing Assistant (ONA) course at LVPEI. Determined to seize the opportunity, Jema dedicated herself wholeheartedly to her studies and successfully completed the course. Today, Jema, staff nurse assistant at LVPEI's KVC campus, is the primary breadwinner for her family.

The L V Prasad Eye Institute is full of such stories and each of them is a source of personal inspiration.

One idea—among the many--that I experienced and learnt from my mentor and our founding chair, Dr Gullapalli N Rao, is to “trust and believe in our team.” Employees are the backbone of any successful organization, and they are the most valuable resource that any organization can have. They are the driving force behind every process, innovation, and success that an organization achieves.

Most disadvantaged youth in rural areas have few career options before them. When they come to LVPEI, they are transformed into eye care professionals tackling needless vision impairment, many a time in their villages and towns. These employees bring their skills, knowledge, and expertise to the table, and LVPEI invests in their development. These investments extend from training all cadres of eye care personnel, to providing opportunities for career advancement at every stage of their employment, including furthering their education/training. In addition, employees are provided with opportunities to pursue formal degree courses including PhD programs in partnership with several universities in India and other countries. Those who are keen on acquiring administrative responsibilities are taken through a diploma in eye health management (DEHM). Clinicians are encouraged to go for advanced courses including full, one-year-long international fellowships. All such efforts help us ensure a team of committed, well-trained, and motivated employees.

We have several examples of individuals who came in as a trainee, began to work for us, and continued to pursue higher education and grow professionally. They play a leadership role today in steering LVPEI towards our mission and vision. My professional career also exemplifies this career trajectory. I began as a cornea fellow in 1996, and today I am proud of delivering on my responsibilities for the organisation. I will remain committed to training and nurturing the workforce joining us to tackle needless vision impairment and blindness. I can also say with great pride and confidence that the dedication and commitment of my team are unmatched. How else can one dream of managing an organization with its network spread over 4 states and 296 locations, taking on the eye care needs of people living in remote and rural areas, while also managing the most complex eye problems at our advanced tertiary eye care centres?

It is the LVPEI team of more than 3000 employees who make it possible day after day and year after year. They are the true custodians of our organisation and own all our successes and laurels. This includes our most recent recognition: LVPEI ranks 6th (from 8th in 2023) among global institutions in the 2024 SCImago rankings in the Ophthalmology category under the health sector. We are ranked 3rd in Asia and 1st in India.

All this employee excellence and accolades are in the service of our patients. Shiva Shanker, one of LVPEI's patients, spoke to us about his experience with an LVPEI Vision Technician. He told us:

In 2018, a thorn injured my right eye, and despite surgery at the government hospital in Hyderabad, I had difficulty seeing. In 2020, a friend talked to me about a new LVPEI primary eye care centre in Jadcherla. The centre is very close to my village, Burugupalle, and is run by Ms B Jyothi. She is also from my village. I spoke to Jyothi who advised me to visit the centre. Jyothi performed a thorough examination of my eyes including retinal imaging and facilitated a visit to the nearest secondary centre at Kothur for further management. At the Kothur centre, I was informed that the problem in my right eye was curable but would require a complex surgery. I was referred to LVPEI's advanced eye care centre at Banjara Hills, Hyderabad where Dr Akash Belenje performed the surgery. After the surgery, my vision in the right eye has improved and I am now able to see things clearly.

I would like to thank Dr Belenje for helping me regain my vision. I am particularly proud and delighted that a vision technician from my village can help those of us who need quality eye care services.

I dedicate this month's note to my team—and I want them all to know that I am proud of them.

-Prashant Garg