

VISION 2020: The Right to Sight Worldwide Effort is Making a Difference



The L V Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad, India

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A fact sheet of the World Health Organization states that more than 161 million people worldwide were visually impaired in 2002. While cataract surgery is a standard procedure in most developed countries, cataract remains the leading cause of blindness (47.8%) in all regions in the world. In other words: of every ten blind people, five could be cured by cataract surgery. Cataract is a disease which can be very easily treated – so why is it so common in developing countries? And what is being done to reduce preventable blindness?

The best known initiative to eliminate avoidable blindness worldwide is VISION 2020: The Right to Sight. It is a global joint activity of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) with an international coalition of professional bodies, eye care institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and corporations. VISION 2020 aims to eliminate avoidable blindness worldwide by the year 2020, in order to give everyone in the world, and particularly those who are needlessly blind, the Right to Sight. Carl Zeiss joined the initiative as the first corporate sponsor in 2002. Since that date, the funding and technology of Carl Zeiss are put to use within VISION 2020. The OPMI® 1 FR surgical microscope, for example, has a solid, rugged design and compact dimensions which make it perfectly suited for use in rural areas.

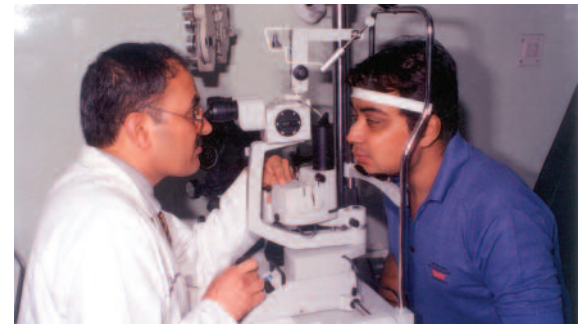
An institute in the vanguard of VISION 2020 is the L V Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad. Established in 1987, it has grown into a comprehensive eye care facility and academic center. As the founder of L V Prasad, my inspiration came from my exposure to the quality of eye care in the American institutions. My dream was to make that kind of care available to all Indians, irrespective of their social or economic status, at their doorstep. To set up the institute, I first went fundraising and met up with the film maker and eponym L V Prasad, who was searching for a project that his charitable trust should support. In addition to L V Prasad's donation of funds, he offered five acres of land in a prime location.

As a hospital, L V Prasad serves more than 600 patients and performs 70 surgeries each working day. Its clinical services cover the entire spectrum of eye care including the most sophisticated surgery and treatments. With the Children's Eye Care Center, the first such dedicated facility in the developing world, children are given the same care as adults. Our claim has been everybody who is treated here (and half of them are treated free) shall get the same quality care as the one who pays the most money.

But the L V Prasad Eye Institute is more than a hospital: It is now also one of the centers for clinical research in the world where clinical practice draws from and feeds back into research. One example from the Prof. Brien Holden Eye Research Center is growing corneal transplant tissue: stem cells from the good eye of the patient are taken and cultured on a membrane to produce a transparent tissue, which can be transplanted to the other eye. The largest ever human trial is underway at the L V Prasad Eye Institute. This technique is especially important as corneal blindness is one of the most serious forms of blindness in India. But it can also be cured through transplantation of a healthy donor cornea. In the Ramayamma International Eye Bank, another facility of the institute, corneas are harvested, stored and transported using methods that meet the most stringent international standards.



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Hands-on training at the ZEISS International Academy for Advanced Ophthalmic Education (left), a pediatric eye surgery (top right), and a typical eye examination in a Vision Center (bottom right).

Whereas people living in the city of Hyderabad have very good access to eye care with this world-class institute, people in the more rural areas of India do not. There are two main reasons for this:

The lack of infrastructure and missing human resources, i.e. capable and well-trained personnel to provide quality eye care.

The institute's International Center for the Advancement of Rural Eye Care, ICARE for short, has been set up to bring eye health to remote rural areas. ICARE is working to develop a comprehensive approach to eye health in India and developing countries of the world by providing and coordinating training efforts. To achieve that goal the following pyramid is brought to life:

The Village Guardians are volunteers with specific responsibilities. A Vision Center is staffed by a Vision Technician who is recruited from the local community and trained for one year. Such a facility is fully equipped for performing ophthalmic evaluation, refraction, dispensing spectacles, and diagnosing potentially blinding diseases. The technician recognises eye problems and refers them to secondary and tertiary centers. In the period between March

2005 to April 2006 in the 20 Vision Centers 46,133 patients were treated. The Vision Centers are linked with the next hierarchy, the Service Centers. These secondary eye care centers are either satellites of the L V Prasad Eye Institute or partner centers, set up with the help of ICARE.

The program is accompanied by a variety of different training courses. For example at the L V Prasad ZEISS International Academy for Advanced Ophthalmic Education, a comprehensive hands-on training program for teaching diagnostic techniques in cornea, retina and glaucoma is offered. In addition, Carl Zeiss scholarships are given to the first ranker of each class.

To honour the active role that L V Prasad Eye Institute plays for the training of eye care professionals and the eradicating of blindness, they received several awards. Among them the Carl Zeiss Foundation Grant for 2004. This award is given annually for the advancement of science and technology and toward social initiatives such as blindness prevention. It was the first such award to be given to India.