



March, 2002



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Rotary International 2001-2002

Avoidable Blindness

"Next to life itself, God's most precious gift is sight - Protect it, Save it, Restore it." **Task Force**

The Power of Partnering

Bringing Better Understanding to the Prevention of Blindness Worldwide

Submitted by Kenneth D. Tuck, MD
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Recognize a need and respond to it. That is precisely the premise of the work Rotary Clubs and The Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (Academy Foundation) perform for the prevention of avoidable blindness in low-income nations. Both organizations subscribe to the belief that the sum is greater than its parts and, therefore, work in collaboration in order to meet the mission.

The mission is critical. Approximately 45 million people are blind. An additional 135 million have disabling visual impairment. Ninety percent of those affected by avoidable blindness live in economically developing nations. People who live in low-income nations are 10 times more likely to go blind than their counterparts in high-income nations. If efforts to prevent blindness are not intensified, the number of individuals with severe visual disability will continue to increase by two million per year, doubling by the year 2020. This propelled the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness and the World Health Organization to launch Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, which is dedicated to mobilizing resources from more than 20 international non-governmental organizations to eliminate avoidable blindness across the globe by 2020.

An ideal example of an initiative put

in place to support Vision 2020: The Right to Sight's mission is the collaborative project Rotary and the Academy Foundation developed to increase the knowledge and skills of ophthalmologists in low-income areas or nations. Now preparing for its third year, the Rotary Club Host Project, modeled after Rotary's GSE program, brings carefully selected ophthalmologists to the United States to spend one week in the host Rotary Club's community and the second week at the American Academy of Ophthalmology's Annual Meeting. The guest ophthalmologists, each sponsored by individual Rotary Clubs and the Academy Foundation, experience a professional, educational and social immersion before returning home to implement newfound techniques and teach new skills to colleagues.

So enthusiastic about the project are the guest ophthalmologists that a few of them have joined, and are planning to join, their local Rotary Club upon returning home, illustrating that the lasting, positive impression and rewards the guests experience provide the impetus for becoming a Rotarian. I cannot think of a better member recruitment tool.

"Before the end of February, I'll hopefully be inducted into the Rotary Club of Nigeria, Enugu, New Haven chapter. I've been attending the meetings. I really thank God for my experience in the U.S.," said Chimdi Menofu Chuka

(continued on page 5)

Make a Big Difference with Matching Grants

Taking a Que. from President Frank Devlyn's call to give priority to Avoidable Blindness projects and President Richard King's having taken this as a thrust area I plan to conduct 5000 cataract operations for the very needy and below poverty line people in various parts of our country .

Each Matching Grant Application will be for 500 operations. The cost of each operation is about US \$16.70. The total funding for each MG is US \$8335. We are looking for a MG Partner to fund US \$3125. Our contribution will be US \$1042.50 and the balance US \$4167.50

we will get from The Rotary Foundation.

The other coordinating agency in all cases will be HelpAge India.

I will be grateful if you will help in locating Matching Grant Partners for this very important project as in most cases the need for the cataract surgery is very urgent. If necessary I can break each MG Application for a lower number. An early response will be really appreciated

Regards and best wishes

MANJIT S. SAWHNEY

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“ . . . a skilled ophthalmologist using safe, high-quality tissue can restore a corneally blind patient’s vision through a relatively simple surgical procedure which takes less than one hour and has the highest success rate of any transplant procedure.”



Corneal Transplantation

Avoidable Blindness is a curse which Rotary recognizes must be overcome in order to provide maximum opportunity to the people of developing countries. And while it is essential that a major thrust be undertaken to promote prevention programs, there is an even more urgent and immediate need to deal with reversible blindness.

Reversible corneal blindness, although its victims number more than six million in India alone (*and more than double that number worldwide*), may not be well known to many Rotarians. While the use of plastic InterOcular Lenses is vastly easing the Cataract problem worldwide, and Merck's high-profile partnership with the UN and other health agencies to fight River Blindness in Africa has been well publicized, most people in the world still are not even aware that corneal disease can be treated with transplant surgery.

By replacing a damaged cornea with healthy tissue donated to an Eye Bank at the time of death, a skilled ophthalmologist using safe, high-quality tissue can restore a corneally blind patient's vision through a relatively simple surgical procedure which takes less than one hour and has the highest success rate of any transplant procedure.

Untreated, the effects of corneal blindness are devastating. Most victims in the developing world are young children, men and women who presently live in needless darkness for many decades. The Eye Bank's role is to recover, process and equitably distribute safe, transplantable corneas to surgeons and their patients awaiting sight-restoring surgery. As is the case with all tissue donation, effective public education is critical.

District 7620 in Maryland/Washington D.C. has made an investment into the lives of the corneally blind by partnering with South Asian Rotarians, the Rotary Foundation and a non-profit organization called TBI/Tissue Banks International to implement several Rotary Matching Grant projects targeting this critical public health problem.

Working closely with Rotarians in both South Asia and District 7620, TBI and its global outreach, the International Federation of Eye and Tissue Banks, have proven to be valuable technical partners, putting 40 years of tissue of experience to work providing oversight for laboratory design, equipment purchasing, program staffing, technical training and ongoing eye bank operations. From the creation of the Rotary-Aravind International Eye Bank in Madurai, India to the purchase of

Corneal Transplantation (*Continued*)

state-of-the-art corneal evaluation equipment for the Ort-Mohler International Eye Bank in Chittagong, Bangladesh, to oversight and training for technicians and program managers in Delhi, India, these projects are helping to bring restored vision to thousands of individuals in South Asia.

A new Rotary Regency Eye Bank Coordination and Processing Centre, funded by a US\$100,000 Rotary Foundation Matching Grant will open this June to serve the 13 million population of Delhi in District 3010 of India. This project was sponsored by the Rotary Clubs of Delhi Regency and Towson/MD Maryland USA, and supported by thirty other clubs in several districts. The role of Rotary is essential in this ongoing effort. It is local Rotarians who, through these Gift of Sight projects, play a key role by working with Eye Bank staff to develop and implement public education and tissue recovery programs on an ongoing basis. And for only a few hundred dollars annually, a club from a developed country can partner with a local club to support its Eye Donation Sta-

tion operations to help provide a greater supply of corneal donations to local Eye Banks.

District 7620's corneal blindness Gift of Sight program is working to involve other Rotary Clubs and Districts in the expansion of these Eye Banking programs to Latin America, Africa, Asia and other areas of the developing world where they are so desperately needed. Together, Rotary can work to reduce and eventually eliminate the backlog of patients waiting for corneal transplants.

Together, we can implement self-sustaining eye banking structures and donation promotion programs that meet tissue needs on an ongoing basis. Together, we Rotarians can expand the efforts of District 7620 and its collaborators to provide the gift of a lifetime for thousands of individuals: their eyesight.

More information regarding Gift of Sight projects to eliminate corneal blindness may be obtained by contacting PDG Robert Ketron at 1.410.464.2788. Email: interact@bigplanet.com or go to his web site <http://www.computerdummy.com>

SEE International Seeking Assistance

SEE International is seeking assistance for preventable blindness projects in Giurgiu Romania.

The clinical work, and doctors are all arranged and completed for the project there. SEE is in need of non monetary assistance in two areas.

1. We need an American traveling to Romania in the first week of May that could hand deliver some boxed surgical equipment to doctors there in Bucharest.
2. Assistance from a local Rotary Club (there are none in Giurgiu) to arrange some of the logistics and greetings for incoming international participating doctors.

We would be pleased to provide you with more details of this first time clinic

in Romania and the dedicated participants. They would much appreciate any assistance and acknowledgment. Their stories are very inspiring.

You can contact either myself or Elizabeth Robbins at the numbers below.

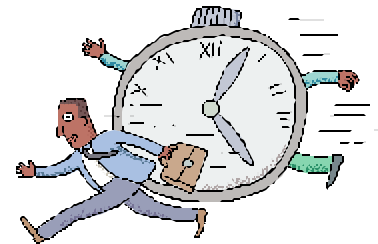
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VISION PROBLEMS IN THE US; SYMPOSIUM

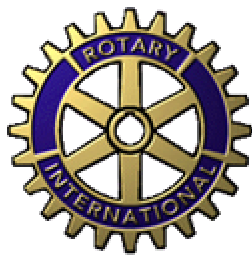


IN WASHINGTON
DC
MARCH 20-21

**Registration
Deadline is
FRIDAY,
MARCH 1, 2002.**

Anyone interested
in registering must
do so now online
at [http://www.us
visionproblems.org](http://www.usvisionproblems.org)
or by FAX:
(847) 843-8458

Eye Bank Dedication in India



'Three cheers for Rotary Club of Delhi Regency, Venu Eye Institute and our professional partners International Federation of Eye and Tissue Banks, as well as my personal thanks to all clubs in Districts 7620, 5150, 7020, 7120, 7210 and 7230 who have cooperated to make this project a success.'

*Yours in Rotary service,
ROB KETRON, PDG*

James H. Leimkuhler wrote:

My sincere appreciation . . . for your generous and active support of this eye bank/corneal transplant project, which will restore the sight and renew the lives of so many for years to come. With Rotary involvement, this enhanced, world class, eye banking facility located at Venu Eye Institute will be quite busy processing a high volume of sight restoring corneas for blind persons in Delhi and the surrounding region.

[Following is a] tentative schedule for the project's completion:

February:

- International Federation of Eye and Tissue Banks (IFETB) orders major equipment not available in India - specifically the (2) Laminar Air Flow Hoods (Biological Safety Cabinets), the Specular Microscope and the Serology Testing Equipment. These items may need 4 to 8 weeks lead time to be assembled, shipped and put in place at Venu. Items will arrive at project site for installation no later than May 15.
- IFETB will communicate with PDG Rob Ketron and Rotarian members of District 7620 to complete collection of funds and related "paperwork" to finalize the Rotary Foundation Matching Grant. The \$25,000 in funds will be deposited in the proper Rotary account no later than February 28, 2002.

March:

- Rotary Club of Delhi Regency, Rob Ketron, Venu Staff and IFETB staff will design promotional/educational plans for inauguration and first year activities of the project with the goal to maximize eye donation and corresponding corneal transplantation surgery. Concept of "Collection Center" will be further developed and the plan for implementation will be designed.

April:

- Purchase and receipt of locally procured equipment and supplies to be completed by Venu Staff.
- Shipment of certain small instru-

ments and supplies from IFETB will be made and will be at the project site by May 1, 2002.

April 2 to May 12:

- 6 weeks Training for Eye Bank Manager, Mr. Saadat (and also possibly for Senior Technician based on decision by IFETB and Ms. Joshi) - at Training Center, Prague, Czech Republic. IFETB will cover travel/transportation expenses for the trainee(s).

April 29 to May 12:

- 2 weeks Training for Dr. Jeena Mascarenhas - Medical Director of Eye Bank at Training Center, Prague, Czech Republic. IFETB will cover travel/transportation expenses.

May: (prior to inauguration)

- IFETB's Administrative and Technical Director will conduct on site training for staff, finalize laboratory design, equipment installation and initiation of new standards in eye bank activities.

Late May or early June: (first choice are dates between May 31 to June 2 - second choice is one week earlier or one week later)

- inauguration ceremony and celebration. Representation and leadership at event from Rotary Club of Delhi Regency, PDG Rob Ketron, current community volunteers in eye donation, Venu and IFETB staff. Also, in conjunction with the inauguration Rob Ketron together with Rotary Club of Delhi Regency, Venu Staff and IFETB would like to have one to two day workshop on promotion of eye donation, expansion of additional collection centers for recovery of eye tissue and related training and learning programs.

June :

- IFETB (with assistance from Venu Eye Institute) will compile and submit Project Report for review by Rotary Club of Delhi Regency and Rotary District 7620 with subsequent submission of Project Report to Rotary Foundation (as required by Matching Grant projects).

The Power of Partnering (*Continued*)

Okasa, MD, one of the Roanoke Club's guests.

Dr. Chuka-Okasa and I continue to stay in contact. She has shared with me thoughts of her future plans, which include the possibility of opening a charity eye hospital with affordable eye services. She stated that in the state where she works, with a population of about three million, there is no effective eye care delivery system. Dr. Chuka-Okasa embodies the vision of the project as she expands medical eye services in areas with great need.

The November 2001 project, which more than doubled in size over the inaugural year, involved the following sponsoring Clubs and 12 guest ophthalmologists:

- Chestnut Hill, PA: Pradeep Agrawal, MD (Guyana)
- Effingham, IL: Yuliya Semenova, MD (Kazakhstan)
- Longview (Greggton), TX: Daniel Oira Kiage, MD (Kenya)
- Mobile Sunrise, Mobile, AL: Nguyen Chi Dzung, MD (Vietnam)
- Roanoke, VA: Chimdi Mennofu

Chuka-Okasa, MD (Nigeria); Marcio Cursino Pires, MD (Brazil); Sergey Branchevsky, MD (Russia)

- Salem, VA: S. Sasikumar, MD (India); Asim Kumar Sil, MD (India)
- San Francisco, CA: Marta Cantillano Alvarez, MD (Nicaragua); Oscar Armando Godoy De Leon, MD (Nicaragua)
- Sea Island, Beaufort, SC: Jefitha Karimurio, MD (Kenya)

As a Rotarian and an ophthalmologist who has long been a part not only of the Academy Foundation but also of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, I am proud of the two successful years of this project. We have a tremendous model for other associations and service organizations to follow in order to meet their own constituents' needs. I eagerly anticipate the international ophthalmologists who have a commitment to blindness prevention whom we will meet in the future—not only for their participation in the program and what they will learn, but, most importantly, how they will apply their knowledge and skills once back in their respective homes.

Have You Looked Into It?



THE AVOIDABLE BLINDNESS MANUAL OF INFORMATION

2001-2002

is available for
download on the
task force Website

Thought for March . . . Are You an Active Rotarian?

As this Rotary year in which President Richard King has challenged all Rotarians to serve because "MANKIND IS OUR BUSINESS" is rapidly moving on, I have adapted an old poem for our Task Force members to consider as we seek to help the visual needs around the world.

Are you an active Rotarian,
The kind that would be missed?
Or are you just contented
That your name is on the list?
Do you attend the meetings
and mingle with the crowd?
Or do you stay at home
And crab both long and loud?

Do you take an active part
To help your club along?
Or are you satisfied to be
the kind that just belong?
Do you ever go to visit
A member that is sick,

Or leave the work for just a few
And talk about the clique?
There's quite a program scheduled
That means success if done,
And it can be accomplished
With the help of everyone.
So attend the meetings regularly,
And help with hand and heart
Don't be just a member,
But take an active part.

Think this over Rotarian:
Are we right or wrong?
Are you an active Rotarian?
Or do you just belong?

Submitted with deep appreciation for all on our Avoidable Blindness Task Force who have actively served because "MANKIND IS OUR BUSINESS" and restoring sight and preventing blindness is a vital program!

O. DOYLE DANNENBERG, O.D.
Assistant General Chairman
Avoidable Blindness Task Force.

www.rotarytaskforces.org/avoidable_blindness