

Refractive Error Blindness (cont'd.)

underdeveloped countries, spectacles, while the least costly and simplest remedy, are still prohibitively expensive. Those living in urban areas have an advantage in availability and affordability of spectacles. The poor, in all areas, lack any advantage.

The challenge to all is how to alleviate the condition of Refractive Error Blindness. Recognition of the problem comes first with adequate screening. Trained personnel must determine the degree of refractive error. Low cost and affordable corrections must become available in all countries. Short term, many benevolent groups can help by providing trained personnel and materials. Long term, training personnel to determine refractive error must occur in all countries. The providing of low cost correction to those having significant refractive error must occur.



In summary, for many the handicap and effect of

Refractive Error Blindness has not been fully addressed or appreciated and the dilemma of providing low cost, technologically simple spectacles remains a challenge. Blindness, by any definition is a concern, a fear and a burden. Correctable Blindness is deplorable, whether it be due to cataracts, macular degeneration or uncorrectable refractive error.

References

- ¹ Refractive Error Blindness; Dandona & Dandona; Bulletin of the World Health organization, 2001, 79 (3)
- ² Blindness in Indian State of Andhra Pradesh; Dandona L, et al; Invest Vis Science 2001; 42(5); 908-916
- ³ Refractive Error Blindness; Dandona; Ibid
- ⁴ Review Article; Ellwein; Journal of Community Eye Health; Vol.15 No. 43, p 37-38
- ⁵ Refractive Error Blindness; Dandona; Ibid

WHO Report on Blindness Prevention

Editor's Note: The following article was published in the July 2006 issue of the District 3310 newsletter.

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report published in April 2006, some 161 million people worldwide are visually impaired. Of these, 124 million people have low vision and 37 million are blind. The report concludes that up to 75% of blindness globally is avoidable. The report also notes that *"blindness and severe visual impairment have a significant impact on the socioeconomic development of individuals and societies ... [but] the resulting downward socioeconomic spiral can be reversed through widely available, appropriate, cost-effective preventive and curative interventions."*

More than 82% of all blind persons are 50 years of age or older and cataract is responsible for 50% of blindness globally. Chronic, noncommunicable diseases such as glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy cause 12% and 5% of global blindness, respectively. Childhood blindness, estimated at 1.4 million affected individuals, with the expectation of many years of life in that state, is the blight of many developing countries. Sadly, up to half of all cases of childhood blindness are preventable or treatable.

The Global Initiative for the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness, known as "Vision 2020 - the Right to Sight," was launched in 1999 as a partnership between WHO and International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. Vision 2020 aims to eliminate causes of avoidable blindness by 2020 and to halt and reverse the projected doubling of avoidable visual impairment world-

wide between 1990 and 2020. Blindness plans have been formulated in 65 countries and are in various stages of implementation.

The RI District 3310 Avoidable Blindness Committee has ambitious plans for 2006-07. Several projects have been planned. "Cataract Surgery for the Poor" is a district project that provides surgery for 80 cataract victims awaiting financial help, with costs estimated at US\$40,000. The "Cambodian Eye Mission," a RC Singapore project, can be upgraded into a district project if funds up to US\$10,000 can be raised. Rotary clubs are encouraged to organize avoidable blindness forums and eye screening in collaboration with governmental or non-governmental organizations. "Seeing Eye to Eye" is a proposed joint project between the Avoidable Blindness Committees of RI Districts 3300 and 3310 to benefit people in Malaysia and Singapore.

Rotary clubs and Rotarians may participate in a range of public relations activities to promote awareness of avoidable blindness. They can participate in exhibitions and forums on avoidable blindness conducted by nongovernmental organizations and hospitals and the SightFirst Program of Lions Clubs International.

Let us make 2006-07 a successful year for the promotion of public awareness of avoidable blindness. As Rotarians, we are well placed to support communities in need. Let us Lead the Way to show what Rotary can do for our fellow human beings. Don't turn a blind eye to saving vision.