

Community Eye Health *Journal*

South Asia Edition



Mid-level Ophthalmic Personnel Training at Aravind Eye Care Systems, Chennai.

INDIA
ARAVIND EYE CARE SYSTEMS

Human Resources for eye health in South Asia



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Human resources in the right numbers, mix and distribution are key to ensuring universal eye health. It is imperative to get a good sense of the current status and challenges in the different countries in South Asia.

The South Asian region has the largest share of the visual impairment burden in the world. While it has offered many innovative models and solutions that has revolutionised eye care delivery around the world, the region is challenged by a lack of adequate human resources in every cadre of eye care. This article, and this issue of the Community Eye Health Journal South Asia edition, will look at the many contours of this issue and discuss some of the solutions on offer.

The World Health Organization (WHO)'s Global Action Plan 2014-19 (and indeed, all the documents from the original VISION 2020 Initiative in 1999) emphasise the

need for skilled human resources for a sustainable and stable eye health delivery system. South Asia is one of the most populous regions of the world and all the countries in the region have varied health systems, governance structures as well as health indicators. However, the good news is that national governments have robust national eye health plans that are also funded.

The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness's (IAPB) Vision Atlas presents the latest available data on blindness prevalence across regions. We now know that more than 87% of visual impairment in the South Asian region is avoidable.

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About this issue

A strong eye health workforce is essential if we are to achieve the goal of universal eye health for all. Setting aside funds to train, recruit and employ eye health workers, and motivate them to stay where they are needed, should be seen as an investment rather than a cost. In this issue, 18 authors from five continents share the lessons they have learnt. Their stories remind us that the eye health workforce is made up of individual human beings, all of whom deserve to be valued and treated with respect. We look forward to your feedback – what have you tried, and what did you learn?

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73 million people live with visual impairment in South Asia. Uncorrected refractive errors (URE) and cataract continue to be the main causes. While the prevalence of visual impairment has come down from 8.47% to 5.74%, there is a clear danger that with an increasing and ageing population, and the epidemics of myopia and diabetic retinopathy these fragile gains will be lost.¹

The paradox

The South Asian region is full of innovation, massive public-private collaborations and immense world-changing success stories. Key developments in the region like mass manufacturing of high quality and yet affordable intraocular lenses (IOLs), the pyramid model of eye care delivery, innovations in surgical techniques and the presence of world-class eye hospital networks have been the engines of success here and around the world.

So, how can the two seemingly contradictory facts co-exist in the same region? The inadequacy of eye health resources is a crucial factor in explaining this gap.

Before we explore this in more detail, we must note that the region has successful models of task-sharing with other eye care personnel. The region has many reputed training institutes, with a network of training centres catering to subspecialty training for ophthalmologists and to an extent for optometrists and allied ophthalmic personnel (AOP).

Current scenario

The three main cadres of human resources in an eye care service delivery system are ophthalmologists, optometrists and AOPs (ophthalmic assistant, ophthalmic technician, ophthalmic nurses and opticians—there is considerable variation in role definition and no internationally accepted understanding of what

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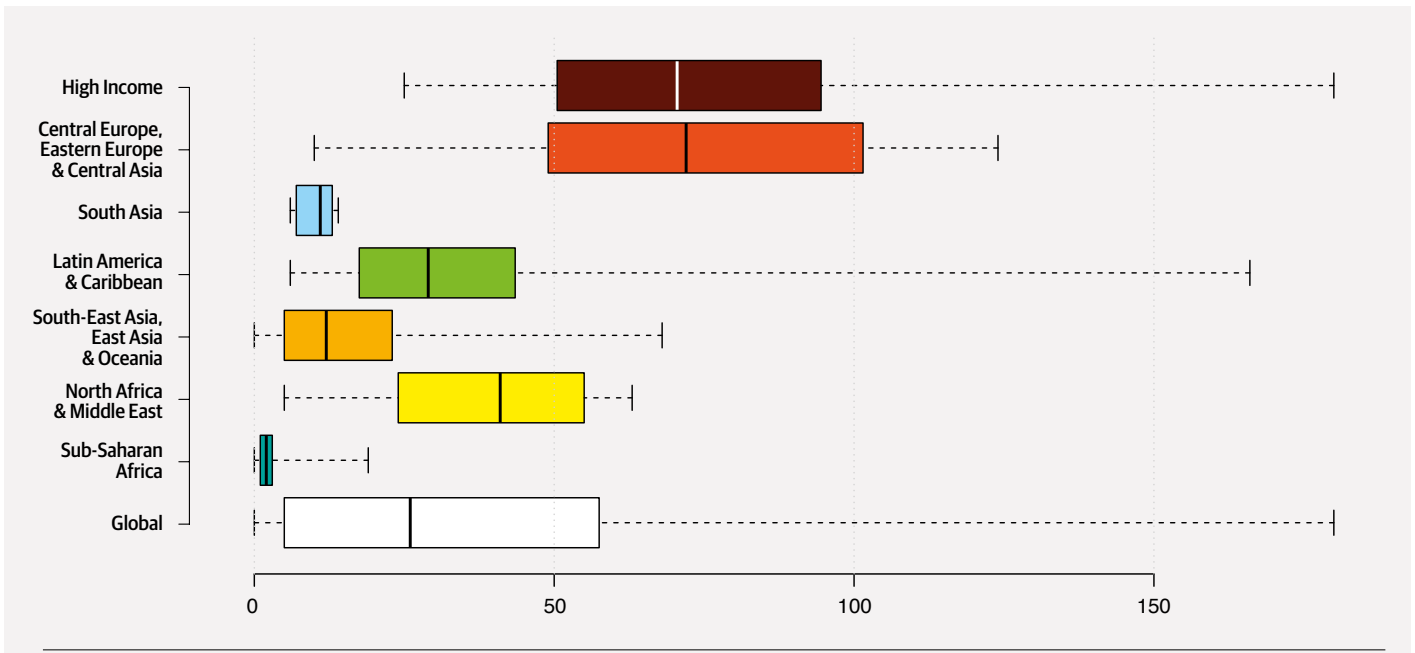
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Data correct as at 12th Oct 2017

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Figure 1 Graph to show the number of ophthalmologists per million population for the 191 countries

makes up this cadre exists). The IAPB Vision Atlas provides data on world-wide availability of human resources. While the data has different confidence intervals for different cadres, it gives a macro picture of the status of human resources for eye care in the South Asian region.

Figure 1 above and Table 1, show the general inequity in the availability of ophthalmologists across world regions, for example, it highlights the severe resource challenge in South Asia--second only to Sub-Saharan Africa.

The major issues effecting human resources in the South Asian region are:

- Inadequate numbers
- Varying skill levels
- Uneven distribution and
- Low productivity

India, with the largest population of 1.2 billion, also has the largest number of ophthalmologists (20,000). India also has a large training capacity and supports subspecialty training for neighbouring countries as well.

There are inequities in the availability of eye care cadre in rural vs urban areas, especially the distribution of ophthalmologists. This exacerbates the lack of access to eye care. In some countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, allied ophthalmic personnel such as optometrists and ophthalmic assistants are not fully recognised nor accredited to carry out eye care services independently. This means the precious time of ophthalmologists is spent on primary eye care and routine skill-based activities like refraction services. Needless to say, this also effects the overall productivity of ophthalmologists in the country and in the region. Further the lack of surgical training and diagnostic skills during primary

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Table 1 Available information on the number of eye care personnel in various cadres and the rate per million population.

S.No.	Country	Population	HR Cadre	Number	Ratio per million	Comments
1	Bangladesh	26,00,00,000	Ophthalmologist	1100	4	
			Optometrist	200	0.7	
			AOP	1000	4	
2	Bhutan	7,50,000	Ophthalmologist	8	10	
			Optometrist	4	5	
			AOP	54	72	
3	India	1,20,00,00,000	Ophthalmologist	20,000	16	
			Optometrist	9,000	7	
			AOP	40,000	33	
4	Nepal	3,00,00,000	Ophthalmologist	308	10	
			Optometrist	470	15	
			AOP	950	31	
5	Pakistan	2,00,000,000	Ophthalmologist	2590	13	
			Optometrist	1605	8	
			AOP	2156	11	
6	Maldives	3,50,000	Ophthalmologist	10	28	(8 are expat)
			Optometrist	10	28	(All expat)
7	Sri Lanka	2,10,00,000	Ophthalmologist	195	9	



NIRANJAN GAIRE, IAPB WSD 18 PHOTO COMPETITION

A trachoma elimination survey in Nepal.
NEPAL

ophthalmic training for optometrists or para-ophthalmic assistants necessitates several years of retraining.

The annual output of cataract surgeries per ophthalmologists in Nepal is much higher than its neighbouring countries. In Nepal all primary eye care and refraction services are performed by either

optometrists or ophthalmic assistants. All countries except Maldives has training capacity for all cadres of eye health human resources. Given their very small population, Bhutan and Maldives do not have sub specialty fellowship training nor such services.

Conclusion

The solutions to addressing this inadequacy in human resources in the countries of the region are diverse. Adoption of strategies like competency based assessments (CBA) and skill certification are emerging as innovative ways to fast-track the development of allied ophthalmic personnel and ensure that they are competent and reliable. Multiple creative—and successful—approaches are being deployed to bring and retain AOP in rural settings across the region. This issue presents a number of these examples from the region. In conclusion we need every effort and innovation to develop and retain skilled human resources, so that we can ensure that eye health reaches everyone, everywhere.

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Paediatric eye care team: a comprehensive approach



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When India's capacity for paediatric eye care presented itself as a mammoth challenge, India Childhood Blindness Initiative (ICBI) was launched by Orbis to help ensure that India's children have access to quality eye care. These efforts have not only contributed towards building the capacity of various cadres of eye health professionals but have systematically created a milieu where paediatric ophthalmology could develop and flourish.



Examining children needs special skills and training. INDIA

One of the most critical deficits in global eye health is the lack of an adequately trained workforce. This is the very reason Orbis was founded: to provide ongoing training and support to eye care teams around the world.

India is home to more than 20 percent of the world's blind population and the largest number of blind children in any country. However, since children constitute only 3% of the world's blind population, childhood blindness has not been given its due importance as compared to other causes of blindness and visual impairment. In 2000, there were only four comprehensive tertiary paediatric eye care centers in India. At that time, with a population of 1 billion, India needed 100 Children's Eye Centers (CEC) as per the WHO guidelines of one center per 10 million population.

required. Having the right people in the right place is the cornerstone of any successful public health programme. Keeping all of this in mind, in 2002, the India Childhood Blindness Initiative (ICBI) was launched by Orbis to help ensure that India's children have access to quality eye care for generations to come.

Comprehensive capacity building

The programme began by identifying tertiary level eye hospitals where CECs could be established. Further, a country-wide survey was undertaken to generate evidence for human resource and infrastructure requirements for elimination of avoidable childhood blindness. This was the first time that such an extensive survey was undertaken in India.

The easier part was the development of infrastructure and systems. The challenging aspect was identifying staff and creating the paediatric ophthalmology teams at a time when paediatric ophthalmology was not recognised as a distinct subspecialty in India. This resulted in limited career options and therefore initially not many individuals were willing to undergo training.

Paediatric ophthalmology team

It is imperative to take a team approach to paediatric ophthalmology to ensure comprehensive care. A paediatric eye care team typically comprises of at least six people: an ophthalmologist, anaesthesiologist, optometrist, nurse, counsellor and outreach coordinator who have undergone specific training in the management of eye diseases in children. Furthermore, other clinical, non-clinical and support staff are trained or oriented to complement the core team.

Paediatric ophthalmologist

The ophthalmologist is trained to conduct a comprehensive ophthalmic evaluation of children keeping in mind the nuances of a child's eye. They need to be able to identify paediatric eye conditions



A paediatric ophthalmologist keeps in mind the nuances of a child's eye. INDIA

Building India's capacity for paediatric eye care presented itself as a mammoth challenge. Examining children needs special skills and their treatment protocols require specific training, knowledge and equipment. This meant we had to build the infrastructure for service delivery including equipping the facilities and supporting community work, along with development of all cadres of human resources

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and manage them appropriately to achieve the best possible outcome. The paediatric ophthalmologist will need to work closely with his/her colleagues in other departments - cornea, glaucoma, retina etc. -- and be aware of community paediatric eye care, vision screening and awareness initiatives.

Anaesthesiologist

Unlike adults, children undergoing eye surgery will nearly always require general anaesthesia. A paediatric-trained anaesthesiologist makes it possible for children to safely undergo sight restoration surgeries, even a few days after birth.

Optometrist

Optometrists are trained in the diagnosis and management of routine and complex eye conditions including refractive error, amblyopia (lazy eye), strabismus and more. They also travel outside the CEC to deliver services to children in the community.

Paediatric nurse

Management of drugs, drawing blood, counselling patients and families, supervising sterilisation, managing the operating room, and assisting surgery are some of their responsibilities. Very often they become the child’s best friend during the child’s time at the hospital before, during and after a surgery.

Counsellor

Patient education and counselling are an integral part of both medical and surgical management of a disease. In children, the eye is still developing therefore information on any intervention, especially surgery and care required before/after surgery are quite different as compared to adults. The counsellor assists parents in decision-making by giving detailed information about the management plan. They alleviate anxiety among parents by providing a detailed description of pre-operative evaluation including pre-anaesthesia check, post-operative care, discharge, and the necessity of long term follow-up. Their training includes basic anatomy and physiology of the eye, common eye diseases and their management, basics of surgical procedures and counselling skills including interpersonal communication.

Community eye care/outreach coordinator

Planning, organising and reviewing outreach activities such as screening camps, community-based rehabilitation, school eye health programmes, etc. are taught. Networking with local government and building strategic relationships within the community are key to their role.

We strongly recommend organisations to have a comprehensive child protection policy to provide clear guidelines for them and their staff to ensure a safe environment for children.

For the team to work more effectively, we recommend:

• **Timing of training**

Considering varying durations of training programmes, it is important to plan the training such that all members complete their training and return to the new CEC around the same time to begin work as one team.

• **Training center**

All members should undergo training at the same institution to ensure ideological alignment and familiarity with the same systems and processes across the team.

Developing the paediatric ophthalmology team

Once people were identified for training, ‘where’ and ‘how’ they would be trained continued to remain a challenge. To address this, three of the existing tertiary level paediatric facilities in the country were developed as paediatric ophthalmology learning and training centers (POLTCs) by providing infrastructure as well as technical support. This included standardisation of the curricula for different cadres of eye health professionals for the CECs and community work.

POLTCs offer fellowships in paediatric ophthalmology, short/ long-term training programmes and periodically conducted workshops/ refresher training as well as continuing medical education (CME). Conducting impactful research on child eye health is an integral part of a POLTC.

To aid continuing education and support, Orbis creates customised hands-on opportunities through the Flying Eye Hospital and hospital-based trainings (HBTs) to increase clinical and surgical abilities of eye care providers. These trainings are tailored to address the requirements of the trainee as well as the community they will be serving. HBTs are especially well-received as they provide an opportunity for the entire clinical staff to get trained and gain experience in their own setting.

PAEDIATRIC OPHTHALMOLOGY TEAM APPROACH



CLINICAL PERSONNEL

- Ophthalmologist
- Anaesthesiologist
- Ophthalmic technician
- Optometrist/Orthoptist
- Ophthalmic nurse
- Operating room technician



NON-CLINICAL PERSONNEL

- Eye care manager/administrator
- Community eye care coordinator
- Medical records in-charge
- Stores/supplies in-charge
- Bio-medical technician
- Patient counsellor
- Receptionist
- Optician



SUPPORT SERVICES

- Patient services
- Housekeeping
- Security
- Transport

In addition, Cybersight, equal parts library, school and remote-medicine service, is open to all eye health professionals around the world for training, consultation and research. Also, it keeps professionals who have undergone training connected with their mentors.

These efforts have not only contributed towards building the capacity of various cadres of eye health professionals and their affiliated institutions to provide care and support to children in need but has systematically created a milieu where paediatric ophthalmology could develop and flourish as a distinct subspecialty within the Indian ophthalmology landscape.

Today there are 33 CECs that have been developed with Orbis support across 17 states in India, and the good work is continuing at these child-friendly facilities. POLTCs continue to provide training and support to the eye care system in India and many neighbouring countries. Further, this model has been successfully replicated in Nepal and Bangladesh.

Competency-based assessment as a reliable skill building strategy for allied ophthalmic personnel



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Developing a cadre of allied ophthalmic personnel poses a particular challenge for ophthalmic institutes as there are no accredited standards or curricula in most of the countries in the developing world. Competency-based assessments are gaining acceptance as they allow students to demonstrate mastery over a subject and earn competency without adhering to a rigid course schedule.



A teacher's role is to facilitate students to take a lead in their own learning. INDIA

Developing a cadre of allied ophthalmic personnel poses a particular challenge for ophthalmic institutes as there are no accredited standards or curricula in most of the countries in the developing world. In such a scenario, it becomes even more relevant to have a robust rubric for assessing skills and knowledge to ensure that this critical workforce gains a desirable level of competence.

A competency is the capability to apply or use a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform "critical work functions" or tasks in a defined work setting. Competency-based assessment (CBA) is a process that determines whether a person meets the standards of performance required for a job. It ensures greater accountability, flexibility, and it is learner-centric. See Table 1, for an example of CBA framework.

In particular, the model has garnered a lot of attention from policymakers and accreditation agencies. CBA allows students to demonstrate mastery over a subject and earn competency without adhering to a rigid course schedule. As soon as a student can prove mastery of a particular set of competencies, he or she is free to move on to the next level. Inclusion of CBA in curriculum of allied ophthalmic personnel has the potential for assuring:

- quality and extent of learning,
- shortening the course duration,
- developing stackable credentials that ease students' transition between learning and work, and
- reducing the overall cost of education

Considering the rising popularity of CBA, we at the Dr. Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital (SCEH) attempted to

adapt CBA into our training and assessment. CBA is a formative approach to assessment compared to the traditional method which is restricted to giving ranks, marks and grades. The process we followed was:

- Revisiting and revising the curriculum of ophthalmic paramedics to align with existing standards
- Identifying core competencies of allied ophthalmic personnel and summarising those core capabilities that are important across all jobs that we believed contributed to the hospital's overall success
 - Patient care
 - Medical knowledge
 - Professionalism, inter-personal and communication skills
 - Technical and scientific Skills
 - Community and health services
- Identifying areas of assessment for each core competency:
 - Mapping the areas of assessment into the various levels of performance such as novice, beginner, advanced beginner and competent and each level of competence is well-defined. For example, a novice observes an activity while the one who has mastered the competency can even supervise others.
- Outline the tasks required to be performed for each area of competency:
 - For example, for pupillary evaluation, one of the tasks can be, checks pupil for shape, size and reaction under varying illumination levels.
- Scoring criteria can be laid down for each milestone for instance 2 for novice, 3 for the beginner, 4 for the advanced beginner and 5 for the competent.

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Table 1 An example for CBA to assess visual acuity

Medical Knowledge					
Area	Activity	Novice (score = 2)	Beginner (score = 3)	Advanced beginner (score = 4)	Competent (score = 5)
Visual acuity	Ability to determine the visual acuity of the patient	Needs assistance to measure visual acuity appropriately and has limited knowledge	Measures visual acuities with Snellen charts	Measures visual acuities appropriately with correct usage of appropriate charts	Accurate measurement of visual acuities with respect to age with correct usage of appropriate charts
		Needs assistance in documentation of the findings	Measures monocular visual acuity and may measure binocular visual acuity for distance and near	Measures both monocular and binocular visual acuity for distance and near	Measures both monocular and binocular visual acuity for distance and near appropriately
			Assesses visual acuity with presenting glass prescription	Assesses visual acuity with presenting glass prescription	Assesses visual acuity with presenting glass prescription
			Assesses pinhole vision	Assesses pinhole vision when indicated	Assesses pinhole vision whenever indicated
			Documents the findings	Assesses visual acuity in special cases (Nystagmus nonverbal cases) appropriately	Assesses visual acuity in special cases (Nystagmus nonverbal cases) appropriately
					Documents the findings properly

- Students can be involved in creation of competency framework development so that they know what they are supposed to achieve to attain a specific level of competence.

A lot of effort is required in defining the areas of competence in a manner that remain unbiased, charts progressive development, and at the same time can demonstrate individual trajectory of competency acquisition. Subject matter experts review the competencies created, modify them and try to ensure that resulting competencies reflect all that a trainee must know and be able to do by the end of the course. We also field tested the competencies and continue to revise them to ensure that individualised learning is measured. Standard operating procedures were developed to ensure smooth transmission of training.



Assessments are done in multiple ways to get a holistic view of a student's understanding. INDIA

We realised that effective assessment is the driving force behind the conversion of the traditional system of teaching to a competency-based education programme. To have better results, the lessons were altered from lectures to supportive/remedial sessions that reach out to students who need additional help. The trainers were selected carefully and were

trained to use the outlined competencies. They were counseled for their role as facilitators to help students to take a lead role in acquiring the outlined competencies in a stipulated time. Adoption of CBA was quite useful as students gained clarity about the level of competency they have achieved. It provided progression of growth and encouraged self-directed remediation.

Potential downsides

On the flip side, CBA can give an impression of “expertise” (as opposed to achieving “competence”). At times students shy away from disclosing difficulties with an innate fear that they will not be pronounced competent. Students feel that they are solely responsible for carving their own learning progression while most of the time it is based on set training schedule. CBAs don't assess “soft skills” that are just as crucial to a successful professional. These could be skills like timeliness, tidiness or team work.

To address such limitations we measure each competency more than once, in multiple ways and by more than one person. In order to get a holistic view about a student, a battery of tests like multiple choice tests, question papers, presentations, log book, case studies, peer-review etc. can also be used to compare them with findings of CBA.

CBA provides an allied ophthalmic professional, transparent job expectations and a potent tool for performance assessment that provides an advancement path. CBA reduces subjectivity and creates a more positive work environment. Since it is new and more research is needed, we should be cautious in relying on results from a single method of assessment. We recommend that CBA be used in conjunction with other formative and summative assessment techniques to supplement the overall assessment of allied ophthalmic personnel rather than using it as standalone method of assessment.

Building an eye care team in rural areas: a central Indian case study



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If attracting, retaining and motivating eye care professionals to give their best is challenge in cities it is a seemingly impossible task in remote rural areas. Sadguru Netra Chikitsalaya (SNC) at Chitrakoot is one of the few hospitals that have turned its rural setting to its advantage. Strategies and details described in this article will help countless other institutions that are struggling with similar issues.

Chitrakoot is an important Hindu pilgrimage centre in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India. All throughout the year, thousands of pilgrims throng this small town from various parts of India. Apart from the religious significance of this town, Chitrakoot is also famous for its quality eye care services. From only a few camps a year during winter many years ago, to a state-of-the-art eye hospital, Chitrakoot has come a long way.

Shri Sadguru Seva Sangh Trust engaged in eye care delivery to the socially neglected communities in Chitrakoot since the 1950s. The organisation had conducted occasional eye camps, especially during winters, as patient turnout was huge compared to other seasons of the year. With the patronage of the founder of the Trust, Ranchhoddasji Maharaj, such programmes managed to serve people even in Chitrakoot's challenging terrain.

Surgical services were mainly organised and provided by voluntary ophthalmologists and nurses from various parts of India, while local volunteers were also involved. Huge tents were laid out to perform eye surgeries and facilitate pre- and post-operative care. Seeing that the annual camps had a huge turnout and a large number of beneficiaries, the Trust management decided to extend the services around the year and established a full-fledged eye hospital in the year 2000, named Sadguru Netra Chikitsalaya (SNC).

With the infrastructure in place, ensuring availability of human resources for provision of services throughout the year was a key challenge. Chitrakoot is a rural area and lacks proper connections with other major towns, good educational institutions for children or even a social life. These were significant barriers for hiring and retaining people. Surgeries were limited to the winter season, and so ophthalmologists were reluctant to join the organisation for a long-term career or training. As a



One of the surgical camps at Chitrakoot. INDIA

result, till 2002, almost 98% of the workload was taken up during the winter months with support from volunteers.

The value of leadership

Dr B K Jain, an ophthalmologist and an ardent supporter of the Trust's mission, joined the eye care division in 1973. Dr Jain was newly married and had to face several challenges convincing his wife to shift from a cosmopolitan city like Mumbai to rural Chitrakoot. However, his passion for service drove Dr Jain to survive and build the organisation. His unique style of leadership ensured others in the team felt valued and brought together people from diverse backgrounds.

Challenges

The Trust was unable to afford permanent staff as there were almost no work during summers. This led to concerns around plans for further expansion of services. As a majority of surgeries were done without IOL implants, quality of the cataract surgery was a big concern. Surgical follow-up among the patients was also poor. Financial constraints added to the list of challenges as the funds came entirely from donors. It limited the hospital's ability to provide adequate financial remuneration and amenities to employees. This even made it difficult to afford state-of-the-art facilities and technical advancements for the patients.

Change

To tackle the seasonal imbalance in patient inflow, the organisation initiated many community-based approaches including cataract screening camps and the establishment of vision centers in remote areas. Collaborations with several eye care hospitals such as Aravind Eye Care System, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and INGOs such as SEVA and Orbis provided the exposure and expertise to add speciality services.

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To assure quality in cataract surgical services, a policy of ‘intraocular lenses (IOL) for everyone’ was implemented with capacity improvement. With the establishment of the School of Paramedical Science at Chitrakoot in the year 1999, the Trust ensured availability of qualified and trained allied ophthalmic staff to the organisation. This was a huge opportunity for ophthalmologists to enhance their productivity without compromising on quality.

To cope with rising financial requirements, in the year 2002 the Trust created a fully paid and a subsidised wing for patients who could afford to pay for the services. The Trust offered the choice of opting for free, subsidised or paid services to the patient themselves. As the patient inflow to paid and subsidised segments increased, it helped to provide adequate financial benefits and better living conditions for the employees on the campus. Professional growth of ophthalmologists and other



SNC, CHITRAKOOT

State of the art eye hospital at Chitrakoot. INDIA

essential cadres was ensured by offering them tiered training courses for all cadres of eye care staff. Continuing medical education (CME) sessions and workshops with visiting faculty helped in keeping the knowledge current and improved the prestige of the hospital.

An overhaul of the information technology (IT) infrastructure was done to improve data management and global connectivity. A dedicated broadband connection made it possible to include tele-ophthalmology at SNC and also considerably improved communication and entertainment for the employees.

Provision of good quality living quarters, shopping facilities, an English-medium school for children and strengthening the *Mahila* (women’s) wing for gainful employment of wives of employees were some of the measures taken by the management that were helpful in retention of employees in the long run. These strategies not only ensured an increase in retention of ophthalmologists, but also helped in the establishment of super-speciality departments including a paediatric eye care centre and a vitreo-retinal department at Chitrakoot.

Progress

Today, SNC is one of the largest rural eye care providers In India with more than 85 ophthalmologists working round the year with the support from 600 para-clinical and support staff. It is also considered as one of the pioneer institutes in the field of community ophthalmology. Its successful engagement with the community to tackle seasonal imbalances is well recognised resulting in more than 35,000 surgeries in summer months. As an organisation committed to its community, today SNC helps various other eye hospitals to tackle such issues and improve overall performance through a continued consultancy programme.

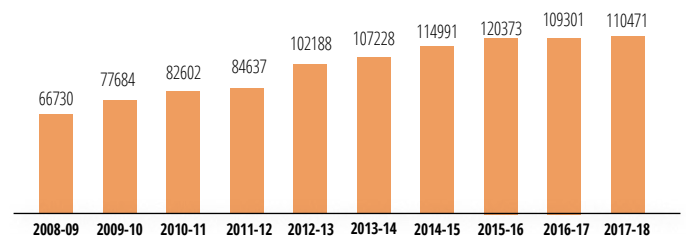
The cataract surgical volume grew year on year with 100% IOL implants, and today it is one of the few organisations in the world to perform more than 100,000 cataract surgeries each year. The establishment of 40 primary eye care centres (vision centres) spread across Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh ensures an increased cataract follow-up rate.

With increased retention of ophthalmologists, improved systems and quality assurance, the hospital today is able to provide comprehensive eye care services in appreciable volumes.

The institute is also a recognised centre for training government surgeons and ophthalmic assistants from various parts of India. A large number of private organisations within India and other countries also enrol for the post-graduate training programme. Affiliation with the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO), has so far enabled ophthalmologists from 12 countries enrol into different programmes. The paramedical wing also provides quality training to several rural youth through its structured courses that include diplomas in ophthalmic assistance, vision technicians, health care workers, operation theatre assistants and lab assistants.

To cope with the high volume and ensure quality, modern infrastructure and equipment were added including 25 state-of-the art modular operation theatres and a world-class central sterile supply department (CSSD). These advancements help us perform 600- 800 surgeries each day.

Figure 1 Cataract surgeries from 2008- 09 to 2017-18



Key Learnings

- Leadership with long-term vision is the key to bringing people together in difficult rural areas.
- The value-based transparent system gives people the confidence to be a part of the system, tackle difficulties and grow together.
- Continuous focus on improvement coupled with partnerships with similar organisations can help build sustainable systems with high volume, quality and increased financial viability.
- Training programmes promote a continued inflow of aspiring workforce and improve the overall functioning and quality.
- Involving employees in decision making for continuous improvement builds a team that is effective and efficient.
- An encouraging work environment and extending support for social life can enhance overall contribution and loyalty of employees towards the organisation.

Speciality	Total number of surgeries
Glaucoma	4,032
Vitreo-retina	6,067
Cornea	4,203
Orbit and oculoplasty	5,780
Strabismus	303
Refractive surgery	745
Paediatric surgeries (squint & others)	3,193

Table 1 Speciality surgeries 2017-18

Nepal: self-reliant in ophthalmic human resources



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In the early 1980s, Nepal barely had any eye care professionals – neither ophthalmologists nor ophthalmic assistants. In three decades this was addressed systematically and Nepal now has a significant workforce, adequate in-country training capacity and training ophthalmologists for other developing countries in Asia. Nepal's incredible journey is an inspiration for other developing countries.



First batch of ophthalmic assistants in Nepal in 1981. NEPAL

The VISION 2020: The Right to Sight global initiative emphasised the key role that eye care human resources play in reducing avoidable blindness, both at a national and global level.¹ In a short period, Nepal has achieved remarkable progress in reducing avoidable blindness and developing a formidable eye care work force. This article takes you through Nepal's journey in becoming self-reliant in ophthalmic human resources.

In the 1980s, Nepal had only one eye hospital in the capital city, Kathmandu, and seven ophthalmologists in the urban centers of Central and Eastern regions and no other trained eye care workforce. About 1000 cataract surgeries were performed every year as people would often travel to India for cataract surgeries. There were no training programmes, either for ophthalmologists or paramedical staff.²

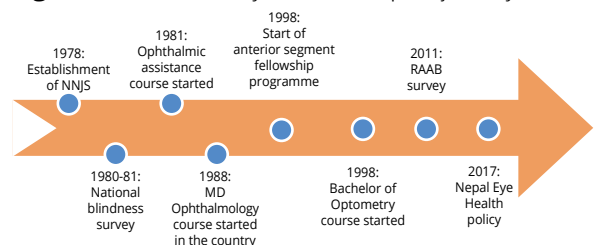
In 1978, nine enterprising and passionate individuals, comprising of social workers, ophthalmologists, industrialists and traders started the Nepal Netra Jyoti Sangh (NNJS). It was started as a national society to develop and provide high quality, sustainable, comprehensive and affordable eye care services to the people of Nepal.

A national blindness survey in 1980-1981 showed the prevalence, distribution and causes of blindness in Nepal. The survey helped in formulating a national plan for the development of eye care services and reduction of avoidable blindness. One of the key components of the plan was to be self-reliant in the ophthalmic human resources within the next 20 years. To achieve that target NNJS reached out to NGOs, hospitals and different institutes in India and other countries to provide post-graduate training in ophthalmology to students from Nepal.

- 10 medical doctors in different batches received training from the All India Institute of Medical

- Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi.
- Three doctors received training from Post Graduate Institute of Medical Research (PGIMR), Chandigarh and five doctors received training from Kasturba Medical College (KMC), Manipal. Different organisations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Swiss Red Cross financially supported the training of these ophthalmologists.
- Similarly, six doctors received training from the United Kingdom through the British Council.

Figure 1 Timeline of key events in Nepal's journey



1988: post graduate MD ophthalmology course in Nepal

In Nepal, a post-graduate course in ophthalmology was started in 1988 at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. Initially, only two candidates were enrolled per year and this was later increased to ten. After the establishment of the National Academy of Medical Sciences (NAMS), existing infrastructure and human resources of different eye hospitals began to be utilised through NAMS for post-graduate training. Presently through different institutes, 45 ophthalmologists are trained each year in Nepal.

Fellowship in anterior segment surgeries was started at Sagarmatha Choudhary Eye Hospital, Lahan in 1998 to attract fresh and young ophthalmologists to come and support the existing workload. Different subspecialty fellowships were also started in Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology and other eye hospitals. At present subspecialty fellowship training is available in almost all ophthalmic institutes.

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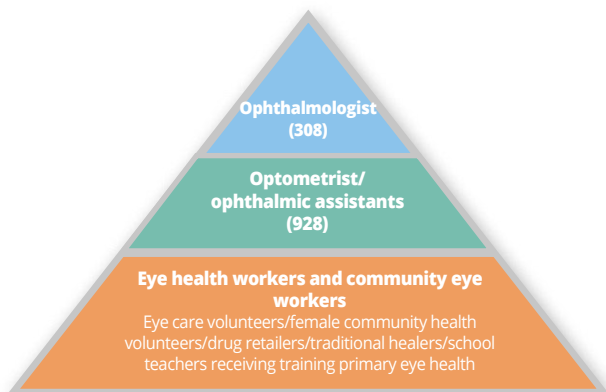
1981: ophthalmic assistant course

To deal with the acute shortage of paramedical staff, a three-year ophthalmic assistant training course was started in 1981 and 50 ophthalmic assistants were enrolled in first batch. The main objective of this course was to develop multitasking paramedical staff to assist ophthalmologists in managing patients at out-patient departments, operation theatres and camp settings. Ophthalmic assistants received training in diagnosis, management and treatment of common ophthalmic disorders. They were also trained to assist in operations, in giving retrobulbar anaesthesia and perform minor eye operations. Currently, eight eye hospitals in affiliation with the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) train about 320 ophthalmic assistants each year. As of today, there are 920 ophthalmic assistants and about 600 more are required by the year 2020.

1998: bachelor in optometry

A bachelors in optometry course was started for the first time in 1998 at the B P Koirala Lions Centre for Ophthalmic Studies. Recently, bachelors' courses in optometry and vision science was started at different eye hospitals in affiliation with NAMS. At present, 50 optometrists receive training every year from two institutes and their affiliated hospitals. Another 50 optometrists trained in India and other countries also join the eye health workforce every year. There are 350 optometrists in Nepal and nearly 250 more are needed by the year 2020.

Figure 2 Three tier pyramid of ophthalmic human resource in Nepal



Eye health worker and community eye workers

Community eye workers form a strong referral network for patients seeking eye care within their communities to the eye care centres and eye hospitals. Eye health workers carry out numerous tasks while aiding ophthalmologists, ophthalmic assistants and optometrists in operation theatres, out-patient departments, for optical dispensing, and screening and surgical eye camps. Various eye hospitals in affiliation with CTEVT are running this training programme for community eye workers as per the need.

Most of the eye hospitals in Nepal provide a one day to one week training on primary eye care to eye care volunteers, female community health volunteers, drug retailers, school teachers and traditional healers. According to their background, different training modules of varying duration are designed for these volunteers. Although the available ophthalmic human resources do not meet the required number according to WHO standards, the capacity is increasing gradually to cater to the needs of the Nepalese population. Despite having insufficient number, more than 3 million patients were examined and more than 300,000 operations were performed in the year 2017. This is only possible

due to adequate and effective utilisation of existing human resources.

Challenges

Brain Drain: A mid-term VISION 2020 review in 2010 showed that brain drain was a major challenge in terms of human resources. Nearly 36% of optometrists, 25% of ophthalmic assistants and 11.2% of ophthalmologists moved out of Nepal for better opportunities.

Distribution: There is an inequality in the distribution of existing human resources in Nepal. Geographically all ophthalmologists are positioned in hilly and flat areas of Nepal whereas not a single ophthalmologist practices in the mountainous region. Nearly 37% of population in Provinces 1 and 3 have access to 60% of eye care human resources while the remaining 63% are served by 40% human resources.

Figure 3 Distribution of eye care human resources in Nepal



Lack of job opportunities in government health care system:

In Nepal, non-governmental organisations (NGO) and privately-run eye hospitals provide basic eye care to tertiary level services throughout the country. This has led to under-utilisation of existing government infrastructure in rural and urban areas.

Insufficient number of trained human resources with

different subspecialties : The rapid assessment of avoidable blindness (RAAB) survey done in 2010 showed that cataract is the major cause of blindness followed by retinal disease, glaucoma and corneal disease. Nepal has insufficient number of specialists to deal with new emerging causes of blindness.

Conclusion and recommendations

Although there has been tremendous progress in availability of trained ophthalmic human resources, there is a need for more, to meet future challenges. Nepal needs to address a gap in specialists and other eye health professionals. Inequality in the distribution of human resources in different states and across different geographical regions can be tackled by providing extra incentives and opportunities for continuous medical education. We need to provide opportunities for ophthalmic human resources to work within government systems, so that existing HR can be distributed at community and district levels in different geographical regions of Nepal. Furthermore, qualitative and quantitative research is needed to test innovative ways to recruit and retain the work force.

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Football to eyeball: thinking out of the box to create an ophthalmic talent pool in difficult geographies

To create and retain locally available pool of ophthalmic talent, thinking out of the box has helped Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital to recruit, train and retain local talent successfully.



Football is used as an icebreaker to negotiate opportunities for young girls. INDIA

It is well established that a pool of optometrists and similar allied ophthalmic personnel are the backbone of any successful eye care programme. It is also true that recruiting and training them is a significant challenge; high turnover of such human resources makes the problem even more significant. Similar scenarios under challenging geographies, especially areas of high poverty and poor infrastructure, makes it all the more complicated.

To create a locally available pool of ophthalmic talent, we need to think beyond traditional solutions. Thinking out-of-the-box has helped us at Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital to recruit, train and retain local talent successfully.

The hospital was started in early 2006 in a remote village in the eastern Indian state of Bihar. It grew from a ten-bed hospital to 400 beds and from 4000 annual surgeries to 65,000 surgeries in just seven years. All the while, it never had to struggle for ophthalmic personnel, especially optometrists and ophthalmic assistants.

The “football to eyeball” programme was started in 2010 to develop a local talent pool of ophthalmic personnel. Under this programme, girls from the local villages are encouraged to play football and train to qualify as professional optometrists thereby empowering them to cure blindness and make a broader societal impact in a very patriarchal society.

This unique programme uses football as an icebreaker to negotiate opportunities for young girls. Girls between the ages of 12-16 are nurtured by the hospital to aspire to become professional footballers or optometrists or both. This initiative is instrumental in targeting gender-based inequalities, exploitation and child marriage - all of which afflict girls in Bihar - and to provide equal opportunities to them. We work as

a hub-and-spoke model wherein football is a crucial instrument of change. Our motto for the programme is “teach football to the girls and draw them out of their homes.” The eye hospital works as a hub for this programme. The spokes are the villages where we had conducted outreach camps.

Football is introduced as a sport to these girls under the supervision of a physical instructor in the local government schools of the villages. Once a girl develops an interest in the sport, we offer them to join full-time and reside at the hostel facilities within the hospital centre. The entire cost of education, training, and living is undertaken by Akhand Jyoti with an objective to motivate these girls to become ophthalmic personnel and role models for future in their local communities.

The girls can simultaneously opt for a four-year bachelors course in optometry after completing their standard XII (A levels). As a qualified optometrist, she can choose to practice at the hospital or start her own optical clinic. This qualified optometrist can easily earn at least five times more than the per capita earning of the rural families in India, creating significant opportunities for livelihood and improving gender parity in the society. Over 90% of these girls opt to work full-time at the hospital centres thereby creating a vast pool of talent from which we can choose. The hospital's current and future human resources gaps mandated stability in support staff, especially ophthalmic personnel. The football to eyeball programme helped us achieve this and at the same time helped us address a significant social issue in the local community - gender inequality.

In summary, these girls are enrolled and provided secondary education, including English and computing skills, and then trained on the optometry and ophthalmic assistant course, and finally offered

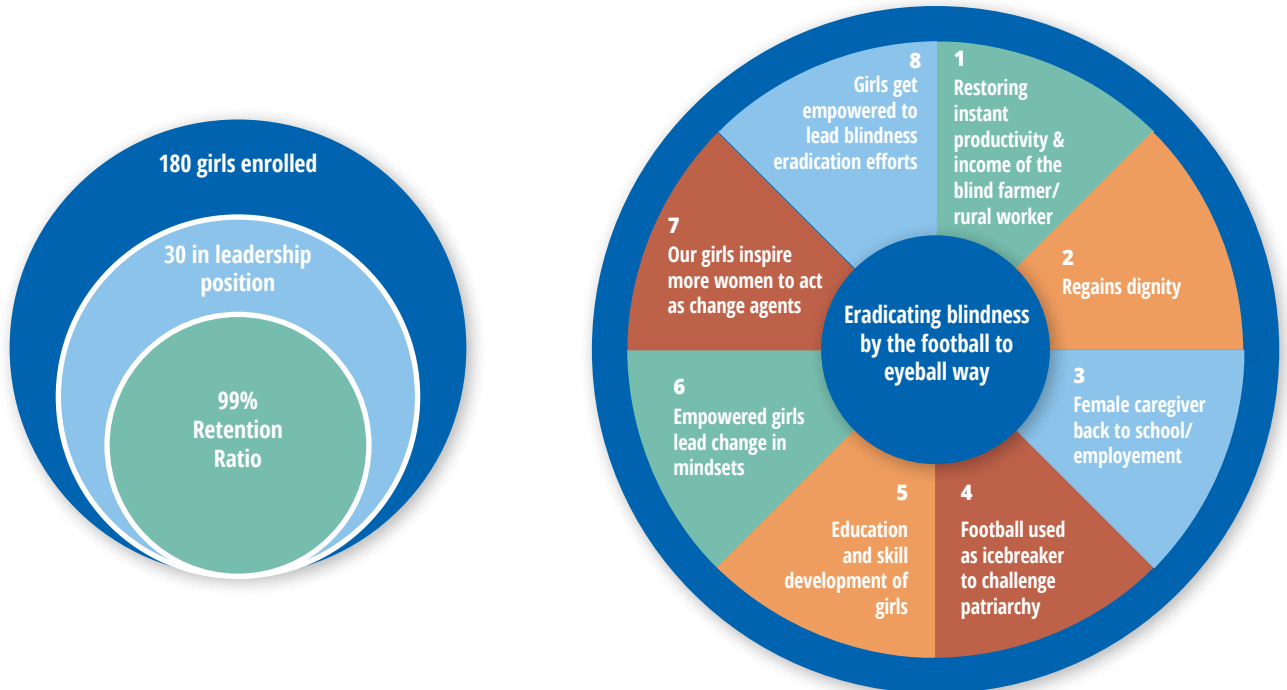
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employment in the hospital. The optometry course combines theory and practical sessions conducted by our in-house ophthalmologists and senior optometrists. The completion of the course ensures that the girl is qualified to practice as an optometrist and in turn they can assist Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital achieve its vision of eliminating blindness in low-income states of India.

A similar model can be replicated by applying the following steps

- Primary objective (critical) – identify an inequity or unjust situation which exists in the community (we identified the girl child – they face strong gender, social and economic inequality in Bihar).
- Secondary objective – to create a locally available pool of skilled manpower which the organisation can continuously use

Figure 1 The success of the programme and the link with blindness.



Key learnings from this talent creating exercise are

- The personal commitment of the leadership towards talent creation is crucial.
- Locally available talent is more straightforward to retain; much more so if their training is carried out at the institution where they are employed.
- Eye care programmes have the potential to make a more significant social impact on local communities.
- Solutions to human resource issues are hidden in the community themselves; it is just a matter of understanding how to transform and use the available raw talent.

- Identify main skills desired to be imparted (optometry in our case)
- Identify the bridging abilities (for us it was English and computing skills)
- Identify how and where the career opportunities at the local level would come from (for us direct employment at the hospital).
- Formalise the enrollment process (we documented the agreements, career plan, sponsorship mechanism, and exit policies)
- Start with direct contact with parents and counsel them along with the candidates (it took us nine months to convince the first girl to enrol; now we have waiting lists of 700 names).
- Identify and create an enabling environment (we had greater success when girls started living 24x7 with us rather than the earlier situation when they were with us for three days in a week)
- Identify the talent with preference to those living in greater inequity (our primary selection criterion is the economic condition of the family).
- Groom and nurture the talent (our priority for the first three months was to improve confidence levels and change mindsets)
- Create a long-term plan to retain the talent (we devised and communicated, in advance, a three year career plan after the girls completed their course)



Optometry class in progress. INDIA

Effective engagement of community health workers in primary eye care in India



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Active and sustained involvement of existing community health workers in primary eye care service can help South Asian countries tackle a major challenge in the region - lack of trained human resources.

Bourne and colleagues from the Vision Loss Expert Group estimated that there are close to 253 million visually impaired individuals worldwide in 2015 of which 14.2% are blind. India contributed about one-fifth to the global magnitude of blindness.^{1,2} Despite the recent gains, cataract and refractive errors continue to constitute about 75% of moderate to severe vision impairment (MSVI) globally.¹

The WHO's Universal Eye Health: A Global Action Plan 2014 – 2019 has prioritised the development and maintenance of a sustainable workforce for the provision of comprehensive eye care services as a key action for reaching the objective of universal eye health.³ Lack of trained human resources is recognised as one of the greatest challenges to reducing the prevalence of avoidable blindness in India.⁴ Given the inadequacy of human resources in healthcare settings including eye care, Mishra and colleagues have strongly argued for a greater role and engagement of community level volunteers like Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) provided they are appropriately trained and sensitised.⁵

Mission for Vision's (MFV) experience in engaging community health workers in primary eye care

Anganwadi workers (AWW)

Anganwadi centres are government-run mother and child care centres in the villages of India. The *anganwadi* workers are women selected from local communities who ensure antenatal and postnatal care for pregnant women, nursing mothers and immediate diagnosis and care for new born children. They are also agents of social change and mobilise community support for better care of young children, girls and women.⁶



School eye health project in Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh. INDIA

MFV's engagement with AWWs began in 2015 with a joint initiative with Dr Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital (SCEH), New Delhi. It involved provision of eye health services to children, enrolled in schools and those out-of-schools in Sardhana and Daurala, in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh. As part of this two-year initiative called Mission Roshni, a total of 89,433 children aged 0 to 16 years were screened for eye conditions. Children in schools and madrasas (an institution for the study of Islamic theology and religious law) were screened by optometrists whilst those out of school and aged 0 to 6, by trained AWWs. Approvals from officials at the local Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) office were obtained for the training and involvement of AWWs in the community eye health (CEH) project.

The training programme for AWWs was tailor-made to suit the project objectives and were standalone exercises. AWWs were paid a monetary incentive of INR. 250/- per each surgical referral and INR. 2/- for each child mobilised for eye screening. A total of 662 teachers and 302 AWWs were trained. Of the total child screenings done, 16,544 (18.5%) were by AWWs. A total of 3,161 (3.5%) were identified with refractive errors and 3,147 (99.6%) received corrective glasses. Ten children were identified with low vision and 139 (0.2%) were identified for surgical treatment.⁷

Active engagement of AWWs helped in generating awareness and counselling of parents to seek appropriate treatment for their children. Working with AWW was a challenge particularly given their varied backgrounds and competencies which impacted the overall performance.

Accredited Social Health Activist

ASHAs are community health workers instituted by the government of India's Ministry of Health and

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Family Welfare as a part of the National Rural Health Mission.⁸ ASHAs serve as a bridge between the healthcare system and rural populations. They motivate women to give birth in hospitals, bring children to immunisation clinics, encourage family planning, and treat basic illness and injury with first aid.⁹

In two of India's north-eastern states, Mizoram and Meghalaya, community eye health (CEH) initiatives were undertaken with the help of ASHAs. First, in collaboration with Synod Hospital, Aizawl, trained ASHAs conducted door-to-door eye screenings in



ASHA training for community eye health project in Kolasib district, Mizoram. INDIA

all the 118 villages of Aizawl and Kolasib districts. Adults aged 50 years or older, who were suspected or self-reported to have eye health issues were advised to visit a local eye camp organised in their respective villages. At these camps, optometrists screened patients for eye conditions including cataracts. Those diagnosed with cataracts and having a visual acuity (VA) of <math><6/24</math> were referred to the base hospital for further medical assessment. A total of 158 trained ASHAs helped in organising 143 eye screening camps. 5,445 individuals were screened of which 935 eyes were operated.

The Meghalaya Integrated Eye Health Project was initiated in collaboration with Society for Promotion of Eye Care and Sight (SPECS), Shillong in 2017 in two districts: East and West Jaintia Hills. The target of this project was to screen 9,000 individuals living in small clusters of villages across the two districts. A total of 135 ASHAs were trained and door-to-door campaigns were conducted to educate and screen the local population for eye conditions. All suspected or self-reported cases were referred to local eye outreach camps, where optometrists screened for potential eye conditions. ASHAs also accompanied the patients from their residence to the camp-site. A total of 122 outreach camps were organised with active participation of ASHAs. 13,790 adults were screened and referred by ASHAs, of whom 1,038 (7.5%) were diagnosed with cataracts and 405 eyes were operated upon.

In both the states, approvals from officials at the District Medical & Health Office (DMHO) were sought for the training and involvement of ASHAs. All trained ASHAs were paid a one-time monetary incentive of INR. 1,000/- for screening and referral to eye health camps.

Involving ASHAs in the CEH projects had helped in creating awareness in the community and improved demand for eye health services. However varying levels of motivation and willingness of ASHAs was a challenge as some felt this was

an additional burden on them. Transport is a major issue in Meghalaya which made it difficult for both ASHAs and patients to travel to eye care centres.

Mahila Arogya Samiti (MAS) workers

MAS workers are community-based women's groups who serve local communities in health planning and action under the National Urban Health Mission framework.¹⁰ Vision centres (VCs) set up by Mission For Vision in association with Sightsavers and Kolkata Municipal Corporation in Kolkata city are the first point of interface for this urban population to address their eye health needs. There are nine VCs in the urban slums of Kolkata to cater to the eye health needs of underprivileged populations.

In 2016, local MAS were co-opted to improve demand for eye services in the region and over the last couple of years 504 MAS workers were trained. These training programmes were tailor-made to suit the needs of the project. No monetary incentives were provided to MAS for their role in the project. In the last two years, the nine VCs catered to about 40,000 patients, of which MAS accounted for about a quarter of all referrals. Actively engaging MAS workers has contributed to an increase in the uptake of primary eye health services, and ensured provision of appropriate follow-up services to the patients. High rates of attrition was the main challenge while working with MAS workers.

Conclusion

Blindness and visual impairment continues to be a major public health problem in India. Availability and easy access to primary eye care services is therefore essential for elimination of avoidable blindness. The advantage of integrating eye health within community health and development initiatives with the engagement of local community workers promotes increase in uptake of primary eye care services. Active and sustained involvement of existing community health workers in primary eye care service provision is a win-win solution, specifically in geographies which are difficult and remote.

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Evidence-based management of eye care delivery



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This article is the the first in series on evidence based eye care delivery. The series highlights the importance of using evidence for planning and effectively managing eye care – both at programme and hospital levels.



Productivity depends on right mix and number of allied ophthalmic personnel. INDIA

Evidence-based management (EBM) is essentially about consciously using sound information for effective management and decision-making.¹ It is an approach that should be practiced to improve the way decisions are made in day-to-day work. This requires having the right evidence or information and a habit of taking decisions based on such evidence.

It is a well-established practice in medicine for many years and in the recent times getting popular in other fields.² Akin to physicians, evidence is important for managers looking to 'cure' their organisation's ills. Just as it is untenable for doctors to treat patients without evidence from patient history and appropriate investigations, it is equally or more dangerous when strategic or operational decisions are taken without appropriate evidence.¹ In this context, it is important to understand what should be measured and monitored to efficiently manage hospitals and healthcare programmes.

In the application of evidence, it is critical that we identify the right metrics so that it serves the organisational goals and brings in excellence in the operations. In this context, the following framework could be helpful. Let us consider the following situation to bring in a practical understanding of this.

Primary eye care or vision centres (VC) are seen as a viable strategy to ensure universal coverage for eye care. This would require everyone in need of eye care accessing the VC and receiving appropriate treatment or referral to address all eye conditions at a cost that is affordable. This requires, amongst other things that the VC has adequate demand. We can explore, how evidence can help the primary eye care strategy to succeed.

Framework for defining metrics

Right metrics are those that help us figure out 'the right things to do' and then ensure that we 'do them right'. The metrics to manage programmes

or projects at strategic level are usually defined at the planning stage itself using Log Frame, a management technique that summarises a project into a 4x4 table, based on goals, objectives and specific tasks of the project, thus ensuring that all aspects are comprehensively covered. Similarly the following framework will ensure comprehensiveness of the metrics identified, to manage eye care effectively.

Purpose: Metrics to assess whether we are aligned with the vision and mission, as well as achieving it. For a VC, the possible metrics could be

- % of population reached out of the service area population
- % of refractive error patients examined against estimated annual need
- % of cataract surgeries against annual need
- % of glaucoma cases identified against estimated need in service population

Demand: Metrics to know where the patients come from and where they don't, the variations; health seeking behaviour viz. how early they come; conditions they come for

- Village level distribution of patients
- Age/gender distribution of patients
- Vision or average duration of eye problem- how early they come
- Diagnosis distribution – for what conditions they come
- Purpose of visit – in addition to eye care needs, patients could also be coming for replenishment of medicines, blood sugar monitoring or information.

Compliance: Metrics to continually know what proportion comply with the advised treatment or follow-up;

- % patients buy/use spectacle as per prescription
- % patients reporting to base hospital as per referral
- % patients buy/use medicine as per prescription
- % patients underwent surgery as per advise

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Quality: Metrics to assess care in terms of surgical outcomes as well as patient satisfaction with service and how it impacts demand.

- % of patients needed referral as per base hospital
- % of patients returned with complaints after using spectacles
- % of patients with postoperative visual outcome conforming to WHO standard³
- % of patients who rate the overall experience as excellent
- Net promoter score - measures willingness of a patient to recommend to others

Human resource: Metrics to ensure that right number and mix of staff are available; productivity measures, retention and attrition rates; employee satisfaction and engagement

- Number of patients handled per day
- Average time-taken per patient
- Punctuality in opening the centre
- Number of days a VC centre had to be closed due to lack of human resources

Finance: Metrics to ensure financial viability; awareness of trends in expenses and revenues

- % of total income over expenses - cost recovery
- Costs incurred per patient

External: Metrics to monitor activities beyond our direct control but would affect our organisation.

- Are there any new/other eye care providers started serving
- Population movement (any migration happening in service region)

Effective use of evidence

Sometimes data by itself may inform the status. However to trigger actions for improvement, making comparisons against a benchmark can be effective. Such benchmarks can be defined based on community needs, targets, external performance and previous achievements. For instance, if we assume that 20% of the service area population would need eye care services then this can become the target for coverage; compliance target could be set at 80% for patients referred to hospital and to ensure financial viability, the costs recovery through patient revenues could be set as more than 100%. When there are multiple centres, comparison of the same metrics across centres facilitates cross learning and improvements. Without having such standards as benchmarks to compare, the evidence on hand cannot translate to corrective measures.

Information is needed at all levels

We need to recognise that information is required at all levels and the design of the information system should reflect it. The senior leadership would be interested in strategic information to know the performance of the primary eye care centre at macro level in terms of population coverage, patient load, revenue, etc. While a mid-level manager would be interested to know about the compliance rate of referrals, surgery, follow-up exam, etc. He or she would need this periodically as well as a comparison across all the centres, for providing appropriate support. Whereas the technician delivering patient care and managing daily operations, would like to review details such as patients who are due for a visit or those who are non-compliant to surgery, so that he or she can act on it.

Practicing evidence-based management

Practicing EBM requires an organisational and individual discipline of making decisions based on evidence. When top management

demonstrates this behaviour, others in the organisation will follow. Information generated should be reviewed periodically at appropriate levels. Such review will invariably throw up action items and these need to be followed through (see Figure 1). These practices ensure continuous improvement and a healthy work environment.

Practical considerations for generating good evidence

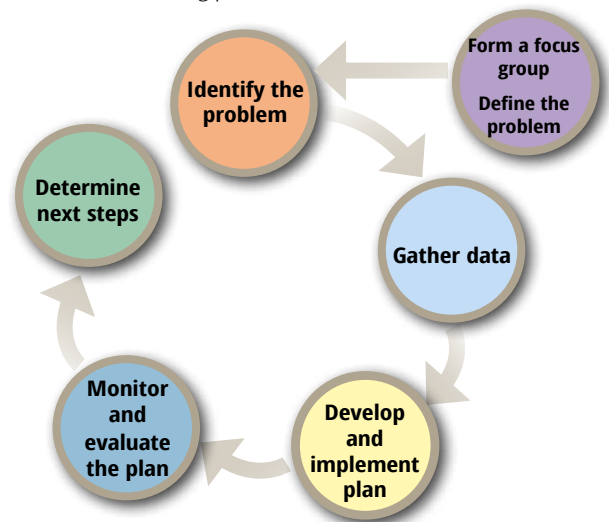
Data quality or its timely availability is often the reason for not using evidence. The root cause of poor quality of data could be due to poor design of the system, lack of training or not having the required technology. However we should recognise that the quality of the data depends on how effectively we use them. Regular usage of information is what improves the quality of data and its timely availability.

The system should be designed to capture data as part of the workflow and allow the users to generate daily report to reflect the quality of the data captured. It is important to verify the quality of data as they are generated and at the end of each day, to avoid surprises when we generate periodic reports.

Role of technology in practicing EBM

Information technology (IT) plays a significant role in building an information system. It is becoming increasingly affordable and easy to use. It is now possible to give information in real-time which can be accessed from anywhere at any time.

Figure 1 Problem solving process



Conclusion

Practicing EBM requires access to accurate and current information as needed; trigger exceptions; highlight areas needing focus, etc. All of this is possible with IT enabled systems. There are many tools available including open-source products such as spreadsheets, databases, statistical packages and Power BI that could help to build a process to capture, process and share the information more efficiently. This in turn facilitates action on the basis of the information, resulting in improved performance or outcomes.

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- 3 Informal Consultation on Analysis of Blindness Prevention Outcomes, Geneva, 16-18 February 1998. WHO/PBL/98.68. [Available from HYPERLINK <http://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/67843> [accessed on May 23]

VISION 2020 INDIA's annual conference

The key outcomes of the VISION 2020 INDIA's annual conference this year was the submission of six recommendations on improving the Health Management Information System (HMIS) to the National Programme for Control of Blindness (NPCB), the nodal body in charge of blindness programmes in India.



A session in progress at the conference. INDIA

VISION 2020 INDIA's annual conference titled 'advocacy and inclusive partnership for eye health' was hosted by Sri Sankaradeva Nethralaya, Guwahati, Assam on 9 and 10 June this year. This time the conference was held in the north east of India, a region where delivering eye health is a major challenge. The states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, for example, have the highest and the second highest prevalence of blindness in the country respectively. More than 500 delegates attended the conference, which had a mix of senior officials from both the central and state governments, heads of organisations, ophthalmologists, programme managers, optometrists and mid-level ophthalmic personnel.

the grant-in-aid programmes of the government and HMIS is the key monitoring tool for grant reimbursements. "Currently NPCB is in the process of revamping the HMIS and recommendations from organisations based on their experiences will help in building a strong HMIS," says Mr Phanindra Babu Nukella, CEO, VISION 2020 INDIA.

A session on 'challenges in delivering eye health in northeast region' highlighted some of the success stories from the region and also recommended improvements. The session was chaired by Dr Promila Gupta, Director General Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India and co-chaired by Dr Dipali Deka, RIO, Assam.

His Excellency, Shri Jagdish Mukhi, Governor of Assam, inaugurated the conference. In his speech, he hoped that the deliberations can be the "key to solve the issue" of Assam having the highest blindness prevalence rate in the country.

Over the years, the annual conference has metamorphosed into a national conference for community ophthalmology. "This conference is an unique opportunity for learning which is generally not available in the more commonly held CMEs that are more clinical in nature," said Dr T P Das, President, VISION 2020 INDIA. The conference is uniquely positioned to discuss and promote delivery aspects of community eye care and has something useful for all departments of a hospital.



Dr Taba Khanna, State Programme Officer, Arunachal Pradesh, NPCB presenting challenges in northeast region. INDIA

One of the key outcomes of the conference was the submission of six recommendations on improving the Health Management Information System (HMIS) to the National Programme for Control of Blindness (NPCB), the nodal body in charge of blindness programmes in India. A robust and glitch-free HMIS system is vital in the Indian scenario, where several not-for-profit eye care organisations perform cataract surgeries under

This year's conference included four tracks: advocacy for eye health; eye care delivery to the unreached; improving patient outcomes in cataract surgery and; skill enhancement for optometrists and ophthalmic assistants. 20 sessions enabled debates, discussions, experience and knowledge sharing from organisations across the country.

Picture quiz



ALLEN FOSTER

A 45-year-old woman in a country with limited eye care services presents with a one-week history of a painful eye with loss of vision. There is no history of injury. After applying fluorescein to the conjunctival sac the appearance is as shown.

Tick ALL that are TRUE

Question 1 What is the most likely diagnosis?

- a. Conjunctivitis
- b. Iritis
- c. Herpes simplex viral keratitis
- d. Microbial keratitis
- e. Traumatic abrasion

Question 2 What clinical signs are present?

- a. Hyphaema
- b. Corneal ulceration
- c. Corneal vascularisation
- d. Hypopyon
- e. Trichiasis

Question 3 What treatments might be useful in managing this condition??

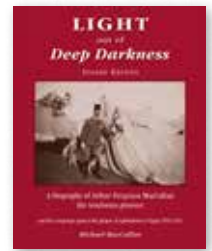
- a. Atropine eye drops
- b. Acyclovir eye ointment
- c. Epilation
- d. Prednisolone 0.5% eye drops
- e. Topical or sub-conjunctival antibiotics

ANSWERS

1) d. There is evidence of corneal fluorescein staining, corneal infiltration and hypopyon consistent with a diagnosis of microbial keratitis.
 2) b, c, d and e. There is no evidence of hyphaema; all other signs are present. Note the one broken off eyelash on the upper eyelid at about the 10 o'clock position of the cornea, which may be the cause of this corneal ulcer.
 3) a, c, and e. This ulcer is unlikely to be due to herpes simplex virus as there is no characteristic branching pattern. Prednisolone is not indicated. Epilation is important to remove the intumed eyelash. Treatment with topical or sub-conjunctival antibiotics is essential.

Biography traces the steps of a trachoma pioneer

Ophthalmic surgeon Arthur Ferguson MacCallan (1872–1955) worked in Egypt between 1903 and 1923. The MacCallan Classification of Trachoma (now replaced by the WHO grading system) was the first grading system used to standardise the diagnosis of the disease. Grandson Michael MacCallan has now published the second edition of his book about Arthur: *Light out of Deep Darkness. A biography of Arthur Ferguson MacCallan, the trachoma pioneer* (2nd edition).



Reader offer. *Community Eye Health Journal* readers can order the book for the reduced price of £30 plus postage and packing (usual price £45). Contact The Choir Press at enquiries@thechoirpress.co.uk or by telephone on +44 (0) 1452 500 016, quoting reference CEHJ09. Offer valid until 30 September 2018.

Obituary: Professor Janet Marsden



Former *Community Eye Health Journal* Nursing Advisor, Janet Marsden, has passed away on the 31st of May 2018. Janet was Professor of Ophthalmology and Emergency Care at Manchester Metropolitan University and has authored several nursing articles in this journal. She was the editor of *Ophthalmic Care* (Wiley) and later made a significant contribution to the International Centre for Eye Health's Ophthalmic Operating Theatre Practice: a Manual for Lower-resource Settings (<https://www.cehjournal.org/resources/ootp/>). Janet's insight, experience and kindness will be missed very much, and we extend our deepest condolences to her family.

Courses

MSc Public Health for Eye Care, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Fully funded scholarships are available for Commonwealth country nationals. The course aims to provide eye health professionals with the public health knowledge and skills required to reduce blindness and visual disability. For more information visit www.lshtm.ac.uk/study/masters/mscphec.html or email romulo.fabunan@lshtm.ac.uk

Free online courses

The ICEH Open Education for eye care programme offers a series of online courses in key topics in public health eye care. All the courses are free to access and include: Global Blindness, Eliminating Trachoma, Ophthalmic Epidemiology: Basic Principles and Application to Eye Disease.

More free courses coming! Certification also available.

For more information visit <http://iceh.lshtm.ac.uk/oer/>

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Next issue



DESIREE MURRAY

The next issue of the *Community Eye Health Journal* is about **planning and preparing for eye emergencies**

Peripheral iridotomy: a first-line treatment for acute angle-closure glaucoma.

Key community eye health messages

Why invest in human resources for eye health?



ARAVIND EYE CARE SYSTEM

- A strong eye health workforce is essential if we are to achieve the goal of universal eye health for all. Strategic investment is needed to meet the growing demand for eye health services worldwide
- A shift in thinking is needed: spending money to train, recruit and keep eye health workers in post (retain them) is an investment not a cost

What are the priorities for investment?



JAMSHYD MASUD/SIGHTSAVERS

- Designing competency-based curriculums that allow trainees to develop essential skills
- Offering life-long learning opportunities/ continuing professional development
- Training allied ophthalmic personnel in order to strengthen eye teams
- Creating and funding posts for skilled eye care workers, where they are needed
- Establishing well-functioning health facilities and offering appropriate incentives to help retain staff members in remote and rural areas

How can we work strategically?



ARAVIND EYE CARE SYSTEM

- Joined-up education and eye health workforce planning will help to ensure that there are enough trained people, with the right skills, to provide services where they are needed
- Investigate, research, and/or forecast local eye needs by volume and type of service needed. This will guide the training and placement of eye health workers