

Giving Sight to the Cataract Blind

September 2007 Update – Report from the Field

Submitted by:

Dr. Shabnum Sarfarz, Deputy Director
Communications and Resource Mobilization
Fatima Memorial Hospital, Lahore Pakistan

ADDRESSING THE ONGOING NEED



Our "Giving Sight" project was set up to treat cataracts, the leading cause of blindness in Pakistan. Thousands of people suffer needlessly because they cannot afford both preventative and remedial treatment. In order to address this problem, Fatima Memorial Hospital (FMH) has been offering free eye camps to provide examinations, and when necessary, schedule cataract surgery and intra-ocular lens (IOL) replacements. Through the work of FMH, persons suffering from cataract blindness have had their vision restored.



We are delighted to report that our "Giving Sight" project has been well received by the local community. Initially, we planned for two eye camps to treat 150 patients; however, due to the overwhelming response, the program had to be expanded. Thus far in 2007, camps were held on February 17, March 17th, April 24th, June 23rd and July 21st. In addition to these five camps, another four camps are scheduled before December 31, 2007. Approximately, 275 patients received free consultation and treatment at each camp. Of the estimated 1,375 patients who have already attended the eye camps and received treatment, over 100 patients were booked for IOL replacements. A total of 60 operations were successfully performed by August 19th and another 40 operations are scheduled to take place over the upcoming weeks.



Patients attending the eye camps are generally from low and poor socio-economic classes and most of the patients are the sole income earners for their families. The patients receiving IOL replacements are generally between the ages of 40 to 85 years. Poor and indigent attendees of the eye camps are provided free medical assistance, including free IOL replacements, post operative medicines and follow-up examinations until the patients are discharged from treatment (usually after two months). An example of one of the many beneficiaries of free surgery and treatment is a low-paid shop employee, who was the sole supporter for a family of seven. Had the FMH eye camp program not been available, it is unlikely that the shop employee could ever afford to seek treatment. Other attendees with limited financial resources receive subsidies of up to 80% towards the cost of their treatment.

MAXIMIZING SERVICES



In order to reach as many patients as possible, every effort is made to minimize the costs of the eye camps and the medical services provided. Currently the cost of providing IOL replacements is approximately \$65 U.S, with a breakdown of \$30 for the Intra-ocular lens, \$10 for medicines, \$20 for surgical costs and \$4 for administrative costs. When providing cataract surgery to our patients we need to not only address immediate treatment, but must also address the long-term impact for our patients. For this reason, we offer 100% IOL implantation to all patients undergoing cataract surgery. Not only have we found that there is a higher level of satisfaction with the IOL replacements, but the procedure also reduces the ongoing costs. With IOL replacements, there is no longer a need for eye glasses, which our poor and financially-challenged patients cannot afford to purchase or maintain.



OUR DEDICATED STAFF



Setting up the eye camps is a large undertaking that requires the contributions and expertise provided by the FMH Faculty of Ophthalmology, the Eye Department and members of the nursing staff. Participants included Professor Jamshed Nasir, Assistant Professor Adnan Hafeez, Senior Registrar Shahid Bhatti, Registrar Sohail Hafeez and SHO Adeel Chaudhary. In addition to these key members of the project, the operation of each camp requires a medical officer, two operation theater assistants, six nurses, two clerical staff and twelve medical students. Without the dedication of the faculty and staff involved in the project, the eye treatment needs of over 1,000 patients would not have been addressed.



OUR WORK CONTINUES



The response to the eye camps program has surpassed our expectations. By effectively using the resources available to us, we have been successful in providing services that will continue to have a beneficial impact on the lives of our patients and their families. During the last quarter of 2007, another four eye camps are scheduled. Hopefully, with the financial support of our donors, we can plan to expand our program to offer a greater number of free consultations and examinations throughout 2008. Additional funding is also needed to enhance our surgical work and to ensure that we have the funds available to provide free medicines and glasses to poor and indigent patients, who do not currently require IOL replacements.



Our program became part of the Global Giving calendar in late 2006. Thus far, we have reached just under 20% of our fundraising goal. For those of you who were the initial donors and helped to get this program implemented, we would like to express our appreciation. Your financial support has been instrumental in providing eye examinations to over 1,000 people and performing eye surgery on 100 people during 2007. Without your help, it would be difficult to continue our work and to give many poor and needy patients the gift of sight.



We hope that this update is informative to our donors and answers the questions of potential donors reviewing our program on the Global Giving website. We look forward to providing our next update in 2008 and hope that you will continue to share our interest in the "Giving Sight to the Cataract Blind" project.