

Report on the workshop 'Media and its role in eliminating avoidable blindness'

December 10, 2012, Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai

"Educational role of the newspapers should be better tapped. Making the information interesting is the key word," Mr N Ram, Editor, The Hindu.

"There is a need to go to the ground level to understand the situation and then write out the key messages. Sitting in the air-conditioned offices will not help us write effective messages," Mr S K Kulkarni, Advisor, Kesari newspaper.

"Be accurate, consistent and don't compromise ever on facts but at the same time there is nothing wrong make your story more presentable," Mr Arun Ram, Senior Editor, Times of India, Chennai

"Target the vernacular press to reach out to the masses", Ms Aarti Dhar, Senior Assistant Editor, The Hindu, Delhi.

These are some of the key messages made by journalists participating in the one day media sensitising workshop organised by VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – India held at Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai on December 10, 2012. The workshop was facilitated by Joseph Eye Hospital, Trichy and hosted by Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai.

Objective: the aim of this national workshop was to sensitise the media about the issues in eye care, especially regarding limitations faced by NGOs working in eye care to reach out to the masses to create awareness. And take the media's inputs as to how best can we collaborate with them.

Heading the panel of speakers from the media was Mr N Ram, Editor, The Hindu; Mr SK Kulkarni, Advisor, Kesari; Mr Arun Ram, Senior Editor, The Times of India, Chennai; Ms Aarti Dhar, Senior Assistant Editor, The Hindu, Delhi Bureau; Dr Neeraja Prabhakar, Programme Executive, All India Radio, Chennai and Mr Rengarajan, Chief Reporter, Dinamani, Chennai.

The one common message that threaded the presentations of all the media persons was that the communication should be interesting, saleable, news worthy and simple.



The daylong workshop was inaugurated by Col (Retd) Dr Deshpande, President, VISION 2020: The Right to Sight - India who welcomed the audience, senior ophthalmologists and journalists defining the need for such a workshop. He said that the country had a huge backlog of eye related cases and now there were new eye problems emerging that had to be treated and in tackling this huge problem, media's collaboration is required to reach out to the general public to create awareness so that the uptake the eye care services provided increases.

Dr Surendran from Sankara Nethralaya welcomed the audience, senior ophthalmologists and journalists for the workshop applauding VISION 2020: The Right to Sight - India's initiative for organising such a workshop and conveyed his best wishes.

The four sessions of the workshop - An overview about blindness scenario in India; Challenges for Managing Eye Care Programs; Media's role in creating awareness and Mainstream media and beyond for creating awareness - saw senior ophthalmologists present all aspects of eye care - right from the burden to the barriers to the role of tertiary, the need for advocacy and how media can help NGOs working in eye care in creating awareness and towards sensitising the media regarding the eye care scenario in India.

The audience of nearly 45 included ophthalmologists, local NGOs, students of journalism and media professionals.

Dr NK Agarwal, DDG (Ophthalmology), National Programme for Control of Blindness, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India in the inaugural session presented the role 'National Programme for Control of Blindness (NPCB) in eliminating avoidable blindness in India' where he outlined what measures the government was taking through IEC materials to create awareness.

This was followed by a cross section of presentations by senior ophthalmologists from leading eye care organisations especially from south India covering all aspects of eye care to sensitise the media. In the first session, **Dr Rohit Khanna**, Associate Director, LVPEI, Hyderabad gave an overview of the 'Burden and Challenges of avoidable blindness in India'; Dr M Pratibha, Joseph Eye Hospital, Trichy gave an overview of 'Burden and Challenges of avoidable blindness in Tamil Nadu'; 'Barriers for uptake of services in the community' was the topic on which **Dr S Chandrashekar Shetty**, Technical Advisor, Lions Club International Foundation, Bangalore and **Dr RD Ravindran**, Chairman, Aravind Eye Care Systems, Madurai spoke 'The need for advocacy'

For the second session **Dr VM Loganathan**, former Director of Regional Institute of Ophthalmology, Chennai made a presentation about 'Educating the community'; **Dr Praveen Vashist**, Additional Professor and Head, Community Ophthalmology Department, Dr. R.P.Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS, New Delhi made a presentation on 'Role of tertiary centre in eye care'; 'Challenges faced by eye care hospitals for creating awareness on eye care' was the topic on which **Mr Govind Hari**, Pushpagiri Vitero Retina Institute, Secunderabad spoke; **Dr. Krishna Kumar**, Principal, Elite School of Optometry, Chennai spoke on 'Role of optometrist in delivering eye care services'.

Dr RV Ramani, Founder & Managing Trustee, Sankara Eye Centre, Coimbatore gave an introduction for the third session, 'What can be media's role in creating awareness about eye care: a NGO's perspective'.

We would like to thank all the Chairs for all the above sessions: Dr Deshpande, President, VISION 2020: The Right to Sight - India; Dr NK Agarwal, Deputy Director General (Ophthal), National Programme for Control of Blindness, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India; Dr VM Loganathan, former Director of Regional

Institute of Ophthalmology, Chennai; Dr. K. Namitha Bhuvanewari, Deputy Director, RIO, Chennai; Mr S K Kulkarni, Advisor, Kesari; Dr Sydney Thyle, Director Eye Services, EHA; Dr RV Ramani, Founder & Managing Trustee, Sankara Eye Centre, Coimbatore; Dr VK Tewari, Educational Officer, National Programme for Control of Blindness & National Programme for Mental Health, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India; Dr S Chandrashekar Shetty, Technical Advisor, Lions Club International Foundation, Bangalore.



In the concluding session, Dr VK Tewari, National Programme for Control of Blindness & National Programme for Mental Health, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India spoke on 'Approaching media with effective eye care messages to reach to the masses' and Dr RR Sudhir, Head Dept of Preventive Ophthalmology, Senior Consultant Cornea Services, Consultant In-charge Electronic Medical Records, Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai

highlighted 'Reaching out to the community by innovative communication'.

Participating in the panel discussion for the media, which was conducted by Col (retd) Dr Deshpande, eminent journalist Mr N Ram from emphasised the increasing reach of the language newspaper. He said the educational role of the newspapers should be better tapped. However what is of utmost importance is making information interesting and that is the key word: "Educative of course, but making it interesting is most important."

Talking about negative reporting, Mr Ram said that in event of accident/infection, the organisation should reach the media with their story first before the news is distorted and published. He also urged that such workshops be held different regions. Mr Ram gave the example of MS Swaminathan Research Foundation who held regular workshops on genetics to sensitise the media. The result may not be immediate but in the long run this strategy will help.

Most of the media persons present agreed with Mr Ram that to reach out to the masses language press is most effective. Mr SK Kulkarni agreed saying, "It has been very rightly pointed out that if we have to reach out the masses in the villages, we have to go with the language newspaper. It has to be in a language that is understood by them."

Ms Aarti Dhar of The Hindu was also of the same opinion, "As far as English versus vernacular papers are concerned, English papers like The Hindu or NDTV may be effective if one wants to influence the policy makers but when it is the masses, it is best to approach through the vernacular press."

Mr Arun Ram of the Times of India, Chennai who has reported on health issues suggested that eye care organisations should look into why certain news is not carried. "Heart gets a lot of coverage. The basic reason may be that a lot of people are afraid of getting a heart attack and not about going blind."

Mr Arun further said that he doesn't believe that those who can pay get more coverage. What is important is that news should be saleable. It has to be sold. "I feel every story has to be presented well."

Detailing his point, he added, "It does not mean that the facts have to be taken off it is only to say that the story has to be more presentable. If we are talking about stories on

blindness then a visual story is any day more effective than a 200 words story in the print media.”

To make the communication interesting, simple and presentable was a point shared by all the media persons.

They had a reason for the communication to be simple. “So many presentations were made today and they were full of technical details,” said Ms Aarti who has been reporting on development issues at the national level for a decade now. Explaining a reporter’s role, she said that they have to understand the facts first and then present it in a manner that can be understood by the layperson who does not know what glaucoma or retinoplasty is. “I have to report it in such a basic level which my maid will understand, my mother and my grandmother will understand.”



Mr Kulkarni who has travelled far and wide in the country and has been very proactive in promoting development sector news suggested that: NGOs could have a panel of writers coining eye care messages in popular languages; We have to go to the ground level to understand and then write out the messages. Sitting in the air conditioned offices will not help in writing effective messages; introduce a fellow ship where journalist can be assigned to study a particular problem in a particular area. This will take care of creating awareness in remote areas like the north east and most importantly that writing well is the key. He emphasised what had been said by other media persons that the news should not be mere recording of event but should be saleable.

Dr Neeraja Prabhakar, Programme Executive, All India Radio, Chennai said that community radio whose mandate is to broadcast programmes on health, environment etc should be tapped. She suggested that eye care NGOs can explore the possibility of collaborating with AIR where news on where camps are being held can be disseminated.

Dr SS Badrinath, Chairman Emeritus, Sankara Nethralaya delivered the vote of thanks saying that dissemination of information should not just focus on curative but also preventive.

VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – India would especially like to thank Dr. N.K. Agarwal, Deputy Director General (Ophthal), National Programme for Control of Blindness, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India; Dr. Praveen Vashist, Additional Professor and Head Community Ophthalmology Department, Dr. R.P. Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS, New Delhi; Dr. K. Namitha Bhuvaneshwari, Deputy Director, RIO, Chennai and Dr. V. K. Tewari, National Programme for Control of Blindness & National Programme for Mental Health, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India for providing their very useful inputs for the workshop.

VISION 2020: The Right to Sight - India is thankful to Joseph Eye Hospital for facilitating, especially Dr Nelson J, Dr Pratibha, Mrs. Aarathi for all their support. We would also like to thank Sankara Nethralaya, especially Dr RR Sudhir for coordinating the entire logistics, Mr Irungovel, Mr Shiva Kumar and Ms Malathi for all their support for hosting the event.

We are also thankful to Shree Pratapraoji Pawar, Chairman Sakal Group and SAM TV for his encouragement and help.

All media persons and delegates at the workshop were unanimous that media can play an important role in reducing the burden of avoidable blindness. The media who attended the workshop and reported on it were from:

1. New Indian Express
2. Dinamalar
3. Kumudum
4. Indian Express
5. News Today
6. Doordarshan
7. Makkal Nanayam
8. Deccan Chronicle

We would also like to specially thank all the following participants from the eye care fraternity, INGO, NGOs and journalism students who took time off their busy schedule to participate in the workshop and helped in making it successful.

Dr Radha Raman, Little Flower Hospital, Anganmalli	Dr Clement, NRHM
Dr Thomas Kuriakose, CMC, Vellore	Dr Vivek
Ms Fairlene Soji, CBM	Mr R Stephen, Bejan Singh Eye Hospital
Mr Jesuraj, CBM	Ms Naveena Vijay, Asian College of Journalism
Dr NSD Raju, President AIOS	Mr E Gopal, President, The Hindu Employees Union
Dr Sydney Thyle, Director Eye Services, EHA	Ms Aisha Mehnej, Asian College of Journalism
Jyotirmay Biswas, Vision Research Foundation	Ms Sruti, Asian College of Journalism
Dr R Gangadhar, RG Eye Care	Dr Aarthi Rajesh, Joseph Eye Hospital
Ms Sudha, Joseph Eye Hospital	Ms Nivedita
Ln SN Hari,	

VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – INDIA
Organises a one day workshop

Media & its role in Eliminating Avoidable Blindness

December 10, 2012

Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai

Programme at a Glance

Monday, December 10, 2012

Welcome & Introduction

Time	Duration	Topic	Speaker
09:30 – 09: 45 a.m.	15 minutes	Registration	
09:45 -10:00 a.m.	15 minutes	Welcome Address	Dr (Col) Deshpande, President, VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – INDIA Dr T Surendran, Vice Chairperson Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai
10:00 – 10:15 a.m.	15 minutes	National Programme for Control of Blindness (NPCB) and its role in eliminating avoidable blindness in India	Dr NK Agarwal, Deputy Director General (Ophthal), National Programme for Control of Blindness, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, Nirman Bhawan,

New Delhi

Session 1: An overview about blindness scenario in India

Conveners: Col (retd) Dr Deshpande and Dr M. Pratibha

10:20 – 10: 40 a.m.	20 minutes	Burden and Challenges of avoidable blindness in India: an overview	Dr Rohit Khanna, LVPEI, Hyderabad
10.45– 10:55 a.m.	10 minutes	Burden and Challenges of avoidable blindness in Tamil Nadu: an overview	Dr M Pratibha, Joseph Eye Hospital, Trichy
11:00 – 11: 10 a.m.	10 minutes	Barriers for uptake of services in the community	Dr S Chandrashekar Shetty, Technical Advisor, Lions Club International Foundation, Bangalore
11:15 – 11: 25 a.m.	10 min	The need for advocacy	Dr RD Ravindran, Chairman, Aravind Eye Care Systems, Madurai

11:25 – 11:40 a.m.

Tea Break

Session 2: Challenges for Managing Eye Care Programs

Conveners: Dr SS Badrinath & Dr. Chandrashekar Shetty

11: 45– 11: 55 a.m.	10 minutes	Educating the community	Dr VM Loganathan, former Director of Regional Institute of Ophthalmology, Chennai
12:00 – 12: 10 p.m.	10 minutes	Role of tertiary centre in eye care	Dr Praveen Vashist, Additional

			Professor and Head Community Ophthalmology Department Dr. R.P.Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences AIIMS, New Delhi
12:15 – 12: 25 p.m.	10 minutes	Challenges faced by eye care hospitals for creating awareness on eye care	Mr Govind Hari, Pushpagiri Vitero Retina Institute, Secunderabad
12: 30 – 12: 40 p.m.	10 minutes	Role of optometrist in delivering eye care services	Dr. Krishna Kumar, Principal, Elite School of Optometry, Chennai
12: 45 – 1:00 p.m.	10 minutes	Q & A	
1:00 – 1:30 P.M. LUNCH BREAK			
Media's role in creating awareness			
Convener: Dr Namitha & Mr SK Kulkarni			
1:35 – 1:45 P.M.	10 minutes	What can be media's role in creating awareness about eye care: a NGO's perspective	Dr RV Ramani, Founder & Managing Trustee, Sankara Eye Centre, Coimbatore
1:50 – 2:05 P.M.	15 minutes	Discretion & Priority in media	Mr SK Kulkarni, Former editor, Sakaal and Advisor, Kesari, Maharashtra
2:10 – 2:25 P.M.	15 minutes		

		Reporting health issue: a national perspective	Ms Aarti Dhar, Special Correspondent, Delhi Bureau, The Hindu
2:30 – 2:45 P.M.	15 minutes	Media coverage of health in general and eye care in particular	Mr Arun Ram, Sr Editor, The Times of India, Chennai

Mainstream media and beyond for creating awareness

Convener: Dr NSD Raju, President AIOS & Dr Sydney Thyle

2: 50 – 3:00 p.m.	10 minutes	Approaching media with effective eye care messages to reach to the masses	Dr VK Tewari National Programme for Control of Blindness & National Programme for Mental Health, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India
3:05 – 3:15	10 minutes	Reaching out to the community by innovative communication	Dr RR Sudhir, Head Dept of Preventive Ophthalmology, Senior Consultant Cornea Services, Consultant In-charge Electronic Medical Records, Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai

3:20 – 3:345p.m.

Rapid fire Q & A to a panel of experts

3:50 – 4:45p.m.		Brainstorming with media persons for an effective communication plan Heading the panel of speakers from the media was Mr N Ram, Editor, The Hindu; Mr SK Kulkarni, Advisor, Kesari; Mr Arun Ram, Senior Editor, The Times of India, Chennai; Ms Aarti Dhar, Senior Assistant Editor,	Invited senior journalist will provide their views for a formulation of communication plan. The discussion will be coordinated by Dr NK Agarwal, Dr GN Rao and Dr M
-----------------	--	---	--

		The Hindu, Delhi Bureau; Dr Pratibha, Programme Producer, All India Radio, Chennai and Mr Rengarajan, Chief Reporter, Dinamani, Chennai.	Deshpande & Dr VK Tewari
4:45 – 5:00 p.m.		Tea Break	
5:00 – 5:30 p.m.		Rapid fire and question answers	Dr. NK Agarwal, Dr. Col Deshpande, Dr. S. Shetty and Dr. Pratibha
5:30 – 5:45 p.m.		Concluding remarks by Joseph Eye Hospital and Sankara Nethralaya	

Hosted by Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai

Facilitated by Joseph Eye Hospital, Trichy