

*Founder of Sadguru Param Pujya
Shri Ranchhodasji Maharaj*

“Attracting and Retaining Trained Ophthalmic Personnel in a Remote, Rural Setting”

Dr. B.K. Jain and K. Anand Sudhan

World of Sadguru ...

A saintly soul, inspired by his feelings for the sufferings of his fellow people, decided to create an institution whose sole objective would be selfless service of mankind. Shri Sadguru Seva Sangh Trust was born over 50 years ago with this simple mission and today has blossomed into a massive parent organization with numerous interests and several accomplishments in its fold.

SSSST is the embodiment of compassionate spirituality and committed voluntary service complimented uniquely with modern infrastructure, technological advancement, new management approaches and an unwavering mission.

SSSST's commitment to eye care in rural India is legendary. Way back in the 1950's, when blindness control measures were unheard of even within the Government, Gurudev with his amazing foresight organized the first eye camp under the auspices of “Tara Netra Dan Yagna” (hospital based eye camps). Till now, 65 such camps were held benefitting more than 600,000 patients. Gurudev was assisted in his mission by notable ophthalmologists and volunteers from Mumbai and Gujarat, who were keen to lend their expertise to Gurudev's noble intentions.

Such was the popularity of Tara Netra Dan Yagna, that there was a tremendous spurt in the patient flow from the states of MP, Bihar and UP. Taking serious view of the magnitude of needless blindness in these three states, the Trust decided to upgrade the services on offer and established a 350-bedded state-of-the-art Eye Hospital—Sadguru Netra Chikitsalaya (SNC) in 2000. With 12 operation tables and technologically advanced equipment, the facility took up the challenge of making available quality eye care to all who visited regardless of social, economic or religious biases. In 2004 alone, SNC had over 45,000 successful eye surgeries to its credit.

At this juncture, SNC is striving to gracefully mature into the first Center of Excellence of, by and for rural India. Despite the growing demand for services in the community, retaining trained Ophthalmic Personnel to address the need has proven to be a stiff challenge for the management.

Under the able leadership of Dr B. K. Jain, Director for the last 5 years, SNC is attempting to scientifically address the Human Resource issues that are necessary to the organization growing into a service delivery institute par excellence.

Pre intervention

In 2000, SNC consciously assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the organization vis-à-vis human resource. A major issue, which stared the management in the face, was of

✂ Attracting and Retaining Trained Ophthalmic Personnel, which manifested itself in several ways.

- ✓ There was inconsistent, sporadic growth in the organization
- ✓ Difficulties were experienced in sustaining high quality of services
- ✓ Upgradation of existing systems and management practices was a challenge
- ✓ Introduction of speciality services apart from Cataract was proving difficult
- ✓ It was an uphill task addressing the growing patient load to the satisfaction of the organization with its meager human resources
- ✓ Patient satisfaction was marred due to lack in promptness of services
- ✓ SNC lagged behind in technological advancements such as IOL implantations (*only 20% of the surgeries were IOL*) since the management hesitated sending the already meager staff out on trainings.
- ✓ The hospital was unable to generate the revenue it has full potential of generating

During the infancy stage of the Trusts eye care program, Dr. B.K. Jain had handled a major portion of the cataract-centered, clinical services offered by it. The average time of stay for any Resident Ophthalmologist during that period was 6 months to 1 year. Issues such as the rural location of the hospital, connectivity with other major towns, education for children, opportunities for entertainment etc prevented qualified ophthalmologists from seeking a career with the Trust's eye care program. Till 2002, almost 98% of the workload was taken up during the winter months when volunteer surgeons from Mumbai stepped in to augment the efforts of Dr Jain and a few fellow ophthalmologists.

The situation with paramedics was no better. Till 1999, 2-3 in house trained ophthalmic assistants handled refractions, A-Scan, keratometry and other preliminary diagnosis. These assistants also doubled up as OT nurses during surgeries. A separate set of personnel handled preoperative and postoperative procedures in the wards.

Changes introduced

The SSSST management though wanted to improve its output and was willing to take a relook at its HR policies, it was very clear about not wanting to deviate from *Gurudev's* principles of eye care as a service to mankind.

"Problems are usually accompanied by Opportunities". In 1999, the Trust decided to introduce training for Nurses and Ophthalmic Assistants. On one hand, there were only one or two institutes which offered such trainings and so the courses became instantly popular and on the other, the Trust now had a cadre of professionals ***trained in their own hospital environment keen to serve as full-time employees or interns within their dedicated eye and general hospital.***



Ophthalmic Assistants course started to cope up with the demand

In 2000, representatives from ORBIS, SEVA and AECS, Madurai visited SNC to conduct a needs-assessment of the institute. The team suggested an exposure to the institutionalized practices of AECS that would support the development of a customized strategic plan for SNC to grow into a Centre of Excellence in rural India. Further to this, the senior management of the Trust attended a vision-building workshop at AECS, Madurai that helped them identify strategies for retention of human resources at the hospitals.

Modern management practices and new clinical goals like 100% IOL were the first steps taken by the management to ensure delivery of quality services, an attraction for Ophthalmologists keen to work in a progressive environment. Training programs were organized for two Ophthalmologists from SNC at Aravind to ensure compliance with the strategy of 100% IOL surgeries.

Appointment Protocol for Ophthalmologists at SNC	
Qualification	MD / MS / DNB / DOMS
Contract period	2 years
Posting	1 st year General ophthalmology
	2 nd year
	13 – 18 months Rotation posting (3 subspecialty) OR
	13 – 18 months Training in one subspecialty
OT Protocol	Observation in OT – 2 months
	ECCE + IOL - 3 rd month onwards
	SICS - 7 th months onwards
	Phaco - 19 th month onwards (Minimum 50 cases)
Conferences	2 (All India / State level) conference in 2 years if paper is accepted otherwise one in 2 years
Other responsibility	Training of Ophthalmologists, Ophthalmic Assistants, Health Workers and other hospital staff. Attending Outreach camp and Vision Centre

The management designed a 2-year contract agreement for ophthalmologists keen to work at SNC with assurance of a comprehensive exposure to clinical and surgical management, community outreach camps, CMEs, academic growth coupled with hands on skill enhancement with world-class faculties from across the globe. Ophthalmologists were also encouraged to seek skill development in various sub-specialties of eye care.

Some of the Ophthalmologists who exhibited a willingness to work longer with the organization were provided short-term training opportunities in sub-specialties like Occuloplasty, Glaucoma and Pediatric Ophthalmology. SNC has also offered long-term fellowships in cornea and Vitreo-retinal services to worthy candidates in lieu of a commitment of dedicated services for a period of 5 years.



Dr. Sharad Partani trained in Occuloplasty at Norwich Hospital

This two-pronged strategy of skill enhancement from Institutes of World repute in lieu of committed services has put SNC on the path of delivering comprehensive eye care services to the rural masses in the true spirit of a Center of Excellence.

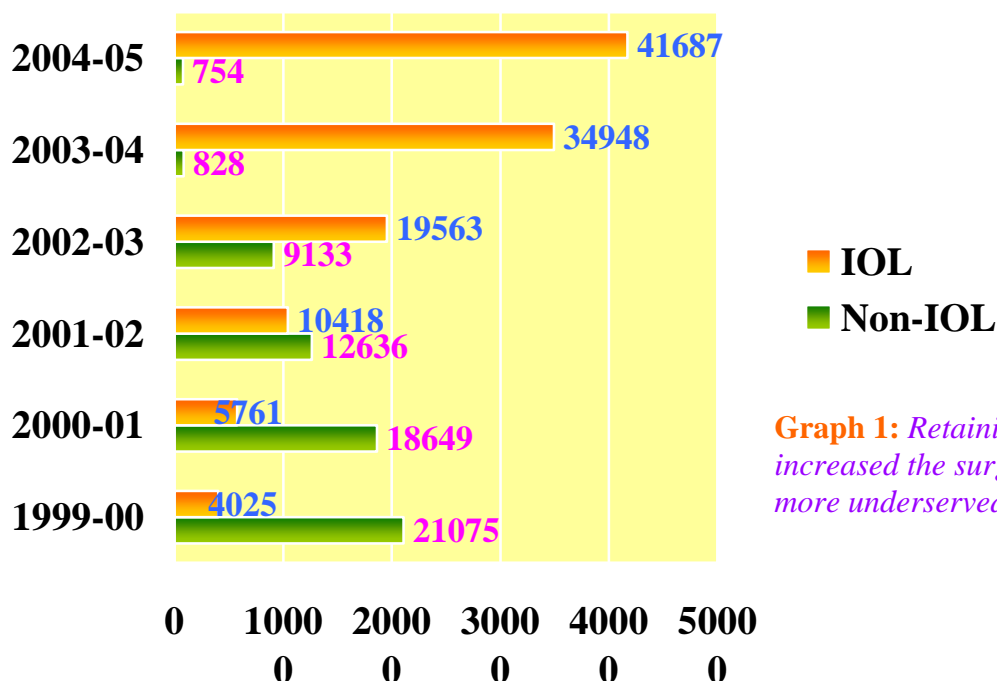
Outcome of Intervention

A comparative analysis of SNC outputs pre and post intervention and the subsequent achievements showcases the quantum of improvement in cost-recovery, number of surgeries achieved, percentage of non-IOL to IOL surgeries, rise in paying patients and the gradual increase in the uptake of cataract surgical services during summer months. The majority of these would still have been a dream were it not for the availability of skilled ophthalmic personnel, staff and a progressive management outlook.

The performance indicators clearly prove that Human resources have an important say in the development of organization.



Dr. Rachael Jose, Deputy Director General (O) at SNC



Graph 1: Retaining Ophthalmic Manpower increased the surgical volume and benefited more underserved patients

The adoption of the new HR policies and retention strategies in 2002, triggered off a massive change in the way the hospital was perceived by its human resource as well as various stakeholders. SNC is being recognized by the Government of India as a training centre for SICS, Pediatric Ophthalmology and Glaucoma programs. Several upcoming eye care hospitals use it as an appropriate case study for sustainable quality eye care service delivery in a rural environment. Recently, the President of India, Dr A P J Abdul Kalam visited the hospital on the first ever visit by a Head of State to the entire region and applauded SNC's model of community eye care.



President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam visited Sadguru on October 6, 2005

Today the hospital boasts a total of 20 ophthalmic surgeons and a healthy ratio of Ophthalmic Assistants and Nurses to offer support services. The transition has helped SNC look beyond surviving the day-to-day functioning of the hospitals to thinking of new ventures and expanding of services to benefit a larger populace. The management is working towards customizing and adopting new management principles, standardization of work procedures, optimal utilization of human resources, promotion of efficient and quality service delivery.

The past five years at SNC have proven beyond doubt that our revised human resource development policy, which addressed the scope for continued education and learning and career growth and twinned it with the values of the organization resulted in the positive growth for the organization. There were no theoretical solutions that were adopted to overcome the challenges. Solutions were devised based on the need, the situation, the individuals in concern and the principles and ethos of the organization.

Have transitioned from this phase, SNC is now meeting head-on the challenges of retaining specialty consultants and attracting management professionals. We hope that this phase too shall pass and the organization would emerge stronger, better and mature enough to don the mantle of the first Centre of Excellence dedicated to the people of rural India.

Sadguru continues to march towards “Service for Humanity” with the blessings of our founder Param Pujya Ranchhodasji Maharaj guiding and inspiring us at every step and leading from darkness to light.

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