

# Gift of Vision: Cataract services in Central India

## Background

Blindness still poses a formidable challenge to the public health systems in India. Cataract accounts for 62.6% of the total blindness in India. Majority of the blinding conditions are either preventable or curable with the available technology.



The blindness prevalence rate is higher in underserved central Indian states of the country where eye care services are grossly limited. In India, the rural - urban divide is quite significant due to the agrarian nature of the economy. Most of the secondary and tertiary level eye care facilities (both government and private facilities) exist only in large and middle urban centers. Facility mismatch and lack of eye care services in rural areas has been of a serious concern, as blindness problem is more pronounced in the rural areas.

## The present scenario

In India, Health has always been a subject of the state ever since independence. As a result, a very large network of health care system managed by the government exists in India. The present health care policy of the government doesn't include eye care as part of primary health care delivery. Majority of the eye care service providers are clustered in the southern region with virtually no organization to provide service to the over 250 million central Indian population.

The tertiary eye-care facilities (in the government / private/charity sector) are mostly located around the major urban centers. Majority of these centers reach out to the rural population through outreach programs. Some Eye care NGO's produce service delivery equivalent to International standards. As per VISION 2020 document, India is committed to reduce the burden of avoidable blindness by the year 2020. Considering the large population base and increasing life expectancy, the number of blind due to senile disorders like cataract is poised for an increase and there needs dual cataract services for the reach in population and the one that reaches out to the community.

## Sadguru Netra Chikitsalaya

Shri Sadguru Seva Sangh Trust (SSSST), a non-profit voluntary organization, based in Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh in India, has been providing eye care services since 1950. When the founder Param Pujya Ranchhodasji Maharaj saw a person suffering from Cataract hit an electric pole and die, he took a resolution of alleviating needless Cataract Blindness. The followers of the founder who later turned volunteers of the Trust performed 950 surgeries in the first camp conducted in Chitrakoot in 1950.



1950: Volunteering surgeons performing eye surgeries

Camps were conducted in different parts of the country till 1980s. The concept of the base hospital was introduced in 1982 long before the national government made it a policy. Eye care services became

functional under the general hospital of the Trust. The seed cultivated by the founder in 1950 took the shape of a dedicated 350-bedded state-of-the-art hospital in the year 2000.

The hospital is housed with 12 operating tables and modern technologically advanced equipments capable of delivering quality eye care at an affordable cost. SNC's eye care services benefits the underserved, poor and marginalized section of the society in remote villages of three Central Indian states -Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar - for the past 5 decades. Till now over 600,000 persons had been restored sight under the umbrella of Sadguru.

## Building Cataract services

The hospital has a separate paying and free service sections. The quality of service remains the same with the exception of physical facilities. Care has been taken to see that no patient returns back of financial barrier. All the 18 Ophthalmic surgeons work at the hospital are capable of performing cataract surgeries.

The advent of new technologies changed the dimension of eye care in India as well that of provided by Sadguru. Till 2000 only 15-20% of the total surgeries performed were implanted with IOLs. Now of the total 42, 441 cataract surgeries performed in 2004-05 99% (41,687)



Outpatient facilities at the hospital

are IOL Surgeries. The transformation from conventional ICCE surgeries to SICS surgeries not only improved the quality of eye care but also benefited more patients and the trust were able to retain professional human resources.

Many of the followers of the Gurudev still render their helping hand in peak seasons (ie. Winter months) where 80-85% of the hospital's work are carried out. Their responsibilities based on their specialization ranges from patient caretaker to a trainer imparting latest techniques to the local surgeons.



Volunteers helping the patients to OT for surgery

SNC on a high volume day handles around 1200 outpatients with 600-700 surgeries.

The voluminous reach in patients never prevented the hospital services reach out to the underserved sections of the community. SEVA foundations supported Outreach camps conducted in 10 districts in the states of MP and UP were able to restore sight to atleast 5000 patients this current fiscal year. In conjunction with the Vision 2020 Action plan of the country the hospital opened 2 Vision centres with the support of ORBIS delivering primary eye care services. Preventive and follow-up care apart from refractive error services remains the core service facility of these centres. SNC plans to open 40 such centres by the year 2020.

**A patient restored eyesight quotes  
“ I will pray for SNC to fight  
darkness from the lives of numerous  
visually challenged people”**

### The Road ahead ...

Sadguru with the backbone of its committed family members and its Volunteers – followers of the founder - now boasts a mission of developing in to a **Centre of Excellence (COE)** delivering Comprehensive eye care, world class Education facilities, Rehabilitation and Research by the year 2020.

According to Dr. B.K. Jain, Chief Medical Officer *“Sadguru's drive towards Vision 2020 will be to perform .15 million Cataract surgeries, increasing the CSR to 1000 / million population in Central India and delivering High Quality, High Quantity and Low Cost Eye care services which is affordable, accessible, available and acceptable to all”*