

# Background of Ophthalmic Assistants Training Programme at Aravind Eye Hospital

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Manpower development is one of the important components of the Programme in control of Blindness. The number of available ophthalmic surgeons is not adequate to tackle the problem of blindness. A skilled ophthalmic assistant qualified by academic and clinical training to carry out ophthalmic procedures under the supervision of ophthalmologist would be able to render supportive services which in return would increase the efficiency and output of the ophthalmologist. It is helpful to have 4-5 ophthalmic paramedics to support one ophthalmologist in a hospital setting.

Aravind Eye Hospital felt the need for the development and utilisation of the ophthalmic assistants in the hospital. There was no formal training programme in the country at that time to meet this enormous requirement. Hence a need-based Ophthalmic Assistants Training Programme was established in 1978.

The ophthalmic assistant programme enables the ophthalmic assistant in developing some basic skills in caring for the patients, their environment and some understanding of the patient's physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs. The programme provides adequate clinical experience so that professional proficiency is developed in the support activities of the OAS like carrying out all measurements relating diagnostic activities (tonometry, Ascan, keratometry), refraction, assisting in surgeries, sterilisation and ward work.

The training lasts for two years. Orientation and basic training is done for first four months. At the end of four months, for 8 months the students are assigned to one of the four areas namely ward, OP, OT or refraction where they will undergo rigorous training. For the next 6 months the candidate will receive practical training under direct supervision



of the senior. For the last six months candidates will perform independently under periodical supervision. Recruitment of OA is done twice a year (January and June). Forty to fifty OA's are recruited and trained per batch.

*Loss of sight can be the greater tragedy next to death, yet hundreds of millions of people suffer from blindness. Participation of the public is the urgent cry for this mission of restoring vision. - Dr. G. Venkataswamy*

One form of the community participation in the combat against blindness is to involve the rural girls who do not have opportunities to continue further studies.

Simple accommodative young girls who have completed 10<sup>th</sup> grade at school preferably from rural background from economically deprived, large families are generally chosen in this programme.

Thousand one-hundred and fifty OA's were trained till January 2001, in 40 batches in 22 years. Periodic CME's are also conducted to upgrade the existing trained OA's. In order to maintain high quality, extensive research has been done in the programmes conducted outside the country, in the US and UK. This programme has been recognised by JCAHPO, which is the apex body that recognises ophthalmic paramedical training in US, and Canada.

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