

Indian Supplement Editorial Board

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Bridging the gap: Barriers at community level, between service providers and receivers

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A large proportion of blindness is avoidable or easily treatable. To address this situation, interventions specific to blindness are required, which will include prevention, eye health promotion, protection, treatment and rehabilitation. The problem of blindness is acute in rural areas and hence the programme must try to expand the accessibility of ophthalmic services in these areas.

Public-private partnership between the government and the private providers in rural areas can help provide quality health care to rural people using existing government infrastructure. In areas where organised medical facilities like small private hospitals or health-related NGOs are absent, training programs can be arranged for existing health practitioners, many of whom may be Registered Medical Practitioners (RMPs) with greater reach in the remotest areas than government hospitals. One option is to build the capacity of such RMPs through training and workshops, so that they are able to prescribe the appropriate drugs and use the medical equipment available in the government hospitals.

Private health care providers can join hands with government to help run

"Public-private partnership between the government and the private providers in rural areas can help provide quality health care to rural people using existing government infrastructure."

primary health centres (PHCs), medical colleges, and hospitals. The current level of service provided by these facilities can be assessed and upgraded, so that they are made more effective and efficient.

Healthcare and civil society organizations

Community health is a field where voluntary agencies have helped develop a variety of models for providing effective eye health care in different parts of the country. Civil society organisations have a varied role to play in healthcare. Some of these organisations have been able to develop village-based health cadres, educational materials and appropriate technology, thus attempting to fill critical gaps in the government health services.

These organizations can become important partners in spreading high quality eye care to the remotest villages in India. The emphasis should be on strategies to increase the reach of the programme to rural / tribal populations, especially poor women and children.

Unutilized Human Resources

A huge human resources base is available in India in the form of volunteers from women's groups, youth groups, self-help groups, the National Service Scheme, community associations, user groups, etc. Unfortunately, these resources are yet to be optimally utilized, as there is no visible or regular system to enrol volunteers, provide them orientation/ training and utilise their services in the voluntary sector on a defined basis.

Gap between Service Providers and Service Receivers

One of the major problems in a country like India is the large gap between the services available and their utilisation by those who most need them. Some of the factors that contribute to these gaps are listed below.

Remoteness: The geographic isolation of some of the areas in rural India makes it difficult for many people to access health facilities and services.

Lack of awareness: Low levels of literacy and education has led to a low level of awareness of eye health issues, particularly in rural areas and urban slums.

Lack of faith in the existing health services.

Religious and cultural beliefs that run counter to good eye health practices.

Lack of public participation.

Strategies to address lack of people's participation:

- Encourage people's participation in implementing government programmes for communities/rural areas by increasing their stake in these.
- Involving people in programme planning, mobilising local resources, and implementing activities.
- Raising awareness among people so that they demand services.
- Taking the assistance of local philanthropic bodies like Lions Club that conduct annual eye camps in the area.
- Bridging the gap between the rural and urban health services.
- Strategies to bridge the gap between service providers and receivers

- Generation of awareness in the community about various eye related problems and their possible remedies, thus increasing the demand for services.
- Selection of local volunteers to interface between the service provider and receiver. They can help in strengthening programmes through community involvement in remote areas.
- Generating goodwill among local health practitioners by relating the success of the effort to their practice. Involving them in the effort would in turn enhance the participation of their patients.
- Forging partnerships with local officials, health workers, private practitioners, NGOs and the community to promote community participation. Involvement of the local authorities can provide the necessary credibility to the effort.
- Strengthening IEC and public awareness for service delivery
- Developing institutional capacity

- Developing human resources for eye care
- Making eye care services affordable, thereby creating physical and economic accessibility.
- The role of various players including government, eye care personnel and private / NGO sectors acting synergistically must be mapped. This can be correlated with information on the disease burden and available resources (human, infrastructure, financial) so as to reach the underserved areas.
- Success stories within the regions should be highlighted.

We need to make consistent and focused efforts to ensure that people in rural areas receive the same kind of care that is available to privileged communities in urban areas. This requires us to proactively design interventions that consider issues of accessibility, affordability and quality.

World Sight Day Activities in India

VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – INDIA Forum and National Programme for Control of Blindness Cell, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India jointly celebrated World Sight Day on October 14 at New Delhi. The theme was “Partnership” between the Government and VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – INDIA Forum, INGOs and NNGOs and corporates in eye care in the country.

The World Sight Day Celebrations were inaugurated with a lighting of the lamp by the honourable Minister of Health and Family Welfare Government of India, Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss on the evening of October 14. On the eve of World Sight Day, the Minister inaugurated a two-day Workshop on “Enhancing Community Participation through Public – Private Partnership in Eye Care” scheduled for 15th and 16th October. To reflect the Partnership, “VISION 2020: The Right to Sight”, was represented by Dr.G.N. Rao, the President of IAPB on the dais. The Minister dedicated the following in the

august presence of 200 delegates from different parts of the country.

1. Release of Brochure of the National Programme for the Control of Blindness for 2000 – 2007 under the 10th Five-year plan.
2. Launch of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – INDIA - Confederation of INGOs and NNGOs nationwide.
3. Launch of the web site of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – INDIA .
4. Unveiling the mascot “Eye Champ” to promote eye donation.
5. Felicitation of leading international and national organisations and eminent persons devoted to eye care in India.

These honoured at the national level were Dr.G.Venkataswamy, Chairman of Aravind Eye Care System, Madurai and Dr. L.P. Agarwal former Chief of Dr.R.P. Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, New Delhi (posthumously). International organisations felicitated were Christoffel-Blindenmission (CBM),

Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF), Operation Eye Sight Universal (OEU), ORBIS International, Seva Foundation, and Sight Savers International (SSI)

National organisations that received mention here were Aravind Eye Care Systems, Dr.R.P. Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, and Sankara Netralaya

The Minister also presented IAPB Awards to Dr Damodar Bachani and Dr Rachel Jose of the Ministry and Mr Thulasiraj and Mr Nagarajan from the NGO sector on the occasion. This was followed by the screening of the film on “VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – INDIA” produced for the occasion.

The celebrations continued with a two-day workshop on “Enhancing Community Participation through Public – Private Partnership” attracting 110 participants from different parts of the country, with focused dialogue on initiatives of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – INDIA.