

Human resources for eye health: experience from Bangladesh

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Background :

In Bangladesh over 750,000 people are blind, of which 650,000 are blind due to treatable cataract. Eye care services provided by the government continue to remain bleak due to low demand as well as inadequate service delivery, including a lack of infrastructure,

85% of eye care services, particularly cataract surgeries, are performed by NGOs and the private sector. In 2003, the National Blindness Survey showed that Bangladesh has around 626 ophthalmologists, of which one third do not have any formal micro surgery training to perform cataract surgery. The productivity of the ophthalmologists is also affected by the limited availability of ophthalmic nurses and paramedics.

Programme:

Since 1973, Sightsavers has been working in partnership with local NGOs in Bangladesh to bring eye care services within the reach of the poorest communities. To address the lack of skilled manpower, Sightsavers developed a strategy to provide hands-on training courses for medical doctors and paramedics using in-country training facilities like Chittagong Eye Infirmary Training Complex (CEITC) and Islamia Eye Hospital (IEH). Initially, surgeons were sent to undertake a Micro-Surgery (MS) Training of Trainers Course at Aravind Eye Hospital (AEH), India, but during the mid 90s, AEH gave technical assistance to IEH in developing its own MS training course. Since then, 12-16 ophthalmologists / medical officers successfully complete the course



Md. Rafiqul Islam/Sightsavers

each year. In 2005, Sightsavers also facilitated introduction of a Small Incision Cataract Surgery (SICS) training course at IEH. Now 99% of IOL surgeries are performed using SICS techniques and the quality of surgery has therefore improved tremendously. All trained surgeons working in Sightsavers supported projects are now able to perform 7-10 SICS surgery in one hour!

In addition, Sightsavers supported a Basic Ophthalmic Training Course for 100 young medical graduates from IEH and the National Institute of Ophthalmology (NIO). More than 40 paramedics received refraction training, and 20 low vision training, from CEITC

with support from Sightsavers. To maintain quality, Sightsavers has joined with Aravind Eye Hospital and the National Institute of Ophthalmology to develop a standard protocol which is being implemented throughout the country.

Future Direction:

Sightsavers will continue to assist its partners, including the government, in building in-country capacity to develop adequate human resources (ophthalmologists and mid level eye care).

