

Needed is action to save the sight of the millions who could be treated today and go on to be an asset rather than a strain upon their communities.

Prevention of Blindness

By

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Three fourths of the blind in India and other developing nations are curable. The time is long overdue for the caring people of the world to launch an attack on curable blindness and rehabilitation of incurable blindness.

Curable blindness does not have the dramatic headline stealing appeal that a flood or famine may have, however, the devastating effects of it may be, in the long run, more catastrophic. In developing countries eye damage, especially by cataracts, deficiency diseases, infectious diseases and lack of ophthalmic care is a continuing disaster which can only be eliminated by a long campaign against it.

Neglected eye disease is not a personal tragedy, but also a tragedy for the patient's family and indeed his community and nation as a whole. The economic loss as a result of the patient's inability to work plus the cost of his care is incalculable.

Research on the causes and prevention of cataracts is urgently needed. An even more desperate need is, immediate action to save the sight of the millions who could be treated today and go on to be an asset rather than a strain upon their communities.

The cure is available today. The problem is to reach those who need his cure. Humanitarianism or perhaps hand-wringing, pity or lip sympathy for the blind is not the answer. The answer lies in vigorous efforts of organizing and conducting the mobile Eye hospitals on a large scale to wipe out the blindness from such areas where it is highly prevalent.

Although the people will still be afflicted by eye diseases but it needs

continuous striving for the eradication and prevention of blindness.

The benefit in economic and social terms will return the cost of investment many times over. The chief blinding affliction in India has always been cataract, an abnormality of the eye characterised by opacity of the eye's crystalline lens.

Mobile eye hospitals offer the promise of good eye care to many who would have otherwise no treatment. Throughout the history of eye surgery in India the available care has generally not reached the curable blind in the villages. Today with modern techniques and treatment of eye disease, restoration of sight could be relatively easily available to the villager with these simple portable arrangements of mobile eye hospitals. At the same time we have to involve the public also in active cooperation and participation and the social and national and international organizations. It is imaginative for any country or society to fight against such a devastating catastrophe i.e. blindness single-handed without the expert advice and service in terms of resources and otherwise.

Hospitals and doctors competently treating eye diseases are usually to be found in large urban centres, but in India about 80% of the population lives in rural areas. The problem then is how to get the doctors with their skill and equipment to the rural areas where the people who need help most are to be found. Mobile eye hospitals are the answer to this problem.

Since many blind people can be cured the blind are now classified as curable and incurable. Ideally all the curable blind should be treated and most of them are in some countries. Unfortunately this

is not true of all countries and many curable blind, especially in developing countries remain needlessly blind all their lives.

As a practical consideration these needlessly blind people put a strain on the economic and social institutions of the developing countries. Untreated blindness also puts a psychological drag on the spirit of growth and hope that any country needs for going ahead with economic and political confidence.

Solving the problems of blind then is especially urgent in developing countries. These problems include restoration of vision if possible and rehabilitation through many means.

As 80% of the population in India lives in the rural areas, special care is difficult to come by because of climate, social and economic conditions, education, variation in the diet and protection of the eyes in hazardous vocations and areas which generally lead to influence the general pattern of eye diseases. However, the main causes of blindness are cataract, uncorrected refractive errors and glaucoma. Untreated complicated injuries and trachoma also play a part.

Cataracts are largely geriatric (though signs are sometimes seen in infancy and through all ages) but if found and dealt with by qualified hands, nearly all are curable.

The need for dealing with cataracts developed and developing in babies, children and adults, is present and will be continuous in the future. In the population of India and probably of other developing nations, cataracts are developing at a rate to keep busy many times the number of ophthalmic institutions, stationary and mobile.