



# Manjari Sankurathri Memorial Foundation

(A Registered Canadian Charity – BN 89002 4995 RR0001)

**Spring Issue**

**MSMF Newsletter**

**April 2007**

## **Greetings!**

What started 18 years ago as a modest attempt to enhance the lives of an impoverished community through initiatives in vision health and education has steadily grown into a vibrant campus encompassing Sarada Vidyalayam school and Srikirana Institute of Ophthalmology.

The good news is that the 11 students, who appeared for the grade 7 public examination, passed with marks in the range 80% to 96%. Some of them obtained 99% in Telugu language and Science subjects.

When Sarada Vidyalayam school reopens in June after summer holidays, the grade 7 students will be able to enroll in grade 8 in the high school which is under construction now.



For Srikirana Institute of Ophthalmology one of the goals set for 2007 is the establishment of a Low Vision Centre. Please see article by Dr. Mary Louise Lapointe in page 2.

Providing eye care closer to home is central to the establishment of Vision Centres. This project funded by the Canadian International Development



Agency (CIDA) is helping fight blindness. A report on the project is in the adjacent column.

Volunteers play a very significant role in our organization, and donors help us help the poor and destitute. We thank all of you from the bottom of our hearts.

[www.msmf.ca](http://www.msmf.ca)

## **VISION CENTRES**

### **A New Dimension in Blindness Prevention**

*“The human toll is incalculable; the economic cost runs into many billions. Training, providing more infrastructure and public health education, combined with the considerable influence of foreign leaders will help contain this problem and in the long run, rid the global community of avoidable blindness. That’s our goal.” - Oliver Foot, President of ORBIS International.*

Since its inception in 1993, Srikirana Institute of Ophthalmology has provided accessible and affordable eye care to the needy in rural areas, at their “door-steps”, by means of a strong outreach program. In the past 14 years, Srikirana has provided outpatient services to over 800,000 and performed over 120,000 sight saving surgeries.

To improve upon the current mode of eye care delivery, to reach further and to reach more, with greater efficiency and effectiveness, Srikirana began an innovative idea, “Vision Centres – closer-to-home care”, to dispense primary eye care on site and refer patients to the base hospital for secondary and tertiary care services. Vision Centres, managed by qualified ophthalmic personnel, provide accessible and affordable eye care to the rural population and generate a predictable steady stream of patients to the base hospital.

Under a project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), four Vision Centres were established in a 60 km range from Srikirana. The Centres are within the reach of about 500,000 people. In the first year of their operation the Centres treated over 13,500 adults and 1,200 school children; dispensed 3,700 spectacles, performed 431 cataract surgeries and 42 glaucoma treatments. The two year funded project will end by March 2008 and we are hopeful that the Centres will become sustainable.

OUR VISIT TO SRIKIRAN  
 Marie Louise Lapointe, MD, FRCS©  
 Ophthalmologist



This is a brief summary of my visit to Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology in Kakinada, India, at the end of December 2006. Since it was so close to Christmas my husband Bernard and my eldest daughter Christine came along. When we arrived at Kakinada after three days of travel, tired and feeling grubby, we were received with open arms by Dr Chandra Sankurathri and his sister Hema. The connection was instant. They invited us into their house and treated us with such warmth and kindness that we felt right at home and part of the family. Dr Sankurathri, also known as Dr. Chandra, who needs no introduction in this newsletter, runs the Srikiran Eye Hospital and his sister Hema runs the Sarada Vidyalayam School. The Srikiran Eye Hospital is what it is today because of Dr Chandra's unwavering determination and hard work for the last 15 years. All who know of his story and of his life's work are profoundly inspired by him.

In Ottawa, I work as a comprehensive ophthalmologist with an interest in Low Vision (LV) rehabilitation. At the LV clinic of the Ottawa General Hospital, I see patients who, despite the best medical and surgical treatments, remain with a visual deficit. This deficit is significant enough to prevent them from performing normal tasks in their daily lives. The art of rehabilitation means finding the best available aids/tools to maximize residual vision sufficiently to perform

the desired daily tasks. Examples of these aids can be as simple as reading under better lighting conditions, using a magnifying lens or binoculars. Higher technical aids include the CCTV (Closed Circuit Television), enlarging software for computers & Braille key boards and printers; just to name a few. The use of such aids improves quality of life and promotes independent living.

I was invited to Kakinada to introduce the basic concepts of visual rehab to the staff at Srikiran. The general idea was to incorporate low vision rehab practices into the general ophthalmology clinics. Srikiran is a hospital known throughout the area for its excellence in the domain of cataract surgery. The surgical team is made up of highly competent and gifted surgeons. Dr Thulasi and Dr Teja are capable of performing cataract surgery of the highest caliber on more than 150 patients a day using the Small Incision Cataract Surgery technique otherwise known as SICS. This technique is best suited for very dense/mature cataracts. Their surgeries are slick, clean and fast. They take less than 3 minutes with rapid return of vision and clear corneas the next day. With a backlog of several million people blind from mature cataracts, their skill is what is most needed in areas where the backlog remains. Resources are available to pay for the surgery for patients who cannot afford it, which is the case more often than none. However finding this funding is a constant challenge. In a situation where resources are limited why spend money on low vision rehabilitation when it could be spent on doing more cataract surgeries to give sight back to blind people? Would I be of any real use in Srikiran? These are questions I asked myself before going to Srikiran. I found my answer in articles on international ophthalmology.

Let's look at the proposal of the "WHO: 2020 The Right for Sight". The arguments are quite convincing:

- 1) There are roughly 45 million blind people in the world today. The most common causes being cataracts, glaucoma, trachoma etc. [Blindness is being defined

as best corrected Vision less than 20/200 in the better eye and or Visual fields less than 20 degrees].

2) For every blind person there are three that are visually impaired, that means 135 million people. [Visual impairment is defined as best corrected Vision Less than 20/70 in the better eye but better than 20/200].

3) That makes 180 million people who cannot see well enough to read the newspaper even with the correct glasses.

4) The cost to society of visual impairment/blindness in terms of lost productivity and social benefits is calculated in billions.

5) So although every effort should be made to cure or treat blindness, it remains imperative that some money be allocated to the rehabilitation of those who cannot be helped by surgery or medical treatment. Hence, visual rehabilitation definitely has a place in the developing world.

As I said earlier my goal in going to Srikan was to incorporate the ABC's of LV rehab in the general ophthalmology clinics. All members of the staff (including the ophthalmologists, the nurses, the ophthalmic technicians and the optician) were open and interested in any new idea that would benefit their patients. I gave many formal and informal presentations. They loved the idea of patients being empowered by such aids and therefore leading better lives. I had brought some aids with me so we could start running some LV clinics as soon as I got there. Future aids will be obtained from a Low Vision Resource Centre set up by the IAPB (International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness) and operated by the Hong Kong Society for the Blind. This centre was set up to centralize purchase and development of low vision devices at particularly low prices to benefit as many low vision persons as possible in developing countries, especially those with underdeveloped low vision services due to financial constraints. A cataract operation costs about \$50.00 to perform and a 20D (5X) hand magnifier can cost as low as \$0.50.

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My husband Bernard works as a family physician at the Montfort Hospital in Ottawa. His skills were discovered early on during our trip. Within a day he had a stethoscope around his neck examining patients with all kinds of problems. Meanwhile my eighteen year old daughter immersed herself in the life of the school. She had a grand time meeting all the children. She was so impressed by their discipline, their thirst for knowledge and their academic success. All this is due to the remarkably loving hand of Hema. All who know her call her an angel for her immense hard work, her iron determination and her real love for children. Despite their demanding work ethic, both Hema and her brother Dr Chandra Sankurathri love to laugh and enjoy life. All our meals and outings were fun and memorable. They managed to feed my daughter all the different kinds of available sweets from the area, to Christine's great delight.

There are no words to express how thrilled I am for having been invited to Srikan. I feel that I have made life long friends. This was such an incredible experience that I have decided to invite myself again next year to see my new friends and see if Low Vision Rehab has taken roots. Despite some early growing pains I am fully confident that this will be a successful enterprise. I thank every one there for their enthusiasm, their hard work and their kindness.



With gratitude and respect,  
Sincerely  
Marie Louise Lapointe & family

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**Honours to Chandra Sankurathri in 2006**

In two separate functions in November and December held in Hyderabad, Chandra Sankurathri received two prestigious awards, "Sankalp Tara", from Raksha International Foundation, and, "Mother Teresa Excellence Award", from Front For National Progress, New Delhi. He was also invited to participate in the First International Prajapati Convention at Bilimora, Gujarat, from 24 to 26 December 2006. He was requested to give details of his voluntary service over the past 15 years and the need for such services.

Raksha International Foundation is a registered non-profit organization striving to build a stronger society through passing on ancient culture and traditions to future generations. On the same occasion, the Foundation also honoured Sri Sundarlal Bahuguna, a prominent social activist and follower of Mahatma Gandhi.

Front for National Progress is a non-profit voluntary organization engaged in gathering public opinion, and organizing welfare activities. During a seminar on "Development Challenges towards 21<sup>st</sup> Century India", the Front selected a galaxy of achievers from different walks of life and all across the country and awarded them the prestigious Mother Teresa Excellence Award. Chandra Sankurathri was chosen for his services to the poor.

**Visitors to our Foundation in India ...**

On their recent visit to India in February / March 2007, Vikram Sundar and Meera Sundar, from Toronto, Ontario, volunteered at Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology.

Vikram, an Information Technology Consultant, analyzed in detail the information technology infrastructure in place at Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology. He provided comprehensive training sessions in network hardware and software, and training on trouble shooting and fixing network connectivity issues.

Vikram, an avid video enthusiast, also captured a large amount of video footage on the school, eye hospital, eye camps held in schools and villages.

Meera, an accomplished artist, and a teacher, volunteered to teach English. This language training helps Srikiran staff to interact and work with those who do not speak Telugu, especially the international volunteers.

Meera found that it was a joy to teach. She found no shortage of interest and enthusiasm in the classroom. It appeared that the staff is more capable of communicating in English than they realize. A little bit of encouragement to practice and confidence building will go a long way.

**APPEAL for Support ...**

In June 2007 Sarada Vidyalayam is being upgraded to a high school, and a Vocational Training Centre will be started. All those students graduating this year from grade 7 will have the opportunity to enroll in grade 8. In the following two years, instruction in grades 9 and 10 will be provided. This expansion will help students maintain their higher standards and stay with their parents. The vocational training program will address youth unemployment problems in the area. A new building required for the expansion is under construction.

Srikiran with its four Vision Centres continues to provide quality eye care.

*We urge you to support generously the education, eye care and disaster relief programs. MSMF is a registered charity in Canada and donations to MSMF qualify for tax credits in Canada. Your donation makes the difference. Thank You.*

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