



Manjari Sankurathri Memorial Foundation

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Autumn Issue

MSMF Newsletter

October 2005

Greetings from MSMF

Twenty years ago, Air India flight 182, while on its way from Toronto to Mumbai was brought down by a terrorist bomb. Three hundred and twenty nine people, children, women and men, lost their lives; Chandra Sankurathri lost his wife, Manjari, son, Srikan, and daughter Sarada.

In a recent 2005 documentary, 'A Ray Of Light', prepared by correspondent Terry Milewski of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Chandra explains how he found a new purpose for his life after the devastating tragedy.

The upper primary school, Sarada Vidyalayam, he started in memory of his daughter in 1992, has educated so far over a thousand children from rural poor families. Principal Theresa Kryski from St. Gregory Catholic School, Nepean, Ontario, visited Sarada *Vidyalayam* in 2004 during the holidays between Christmas and New Year and her report is available on our website.

The eye hospital, Srikan Institute of Ophthalmology, he started in 1993 in memory of his son with the collaboration of his childhood friend, ophthalmologist, philanthropist, and President of Eye Foundation of America, Dr. V. K. Raju, is doing a yeomen service to a population of over five million with blindness prevention programs. Dr. Sanjoy Gupta, an ophthalmologist from Thunder Bay, Ontario, visited Srikan in July 2005 and his report is included in this newsletter.

Chandra Sankurathri visited us in September – October 2005, and a report on his travels in Canada and the USA are included in this newsletter as well.

The CBC documentary, A Ray Of Light, touched many people from all across Canada and the USA. We thank all those who have shared their thoughts and pledged their support. We are grateful to Terry Milewski, Cedric Monteiro, Sat Nandlall, Michael Taylor-Noonan, and the CBC.

Chandra Sankurathri's visit

Chandra arrived in Ottawa on September 7 for a four-week visit. After a couple of days in Ottawa, he left for New Jersey, New York, and Washington DC. There, thanks to the tireless efforts of Ms. Mohini Sarin, a social activist, he had the extraordinary opportunity of participating in several media interviews and addressing at public meetings raising awareness of the humanitarian work that is being done in India. In Washington, DC, Chandra met Directors of 'Our Voices Together', a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that aims to use collective voices and resources to support and encourage worthwhile international projects, foster goodwill and promote understanding. In so doing, honour those, who lost their lives to terrorist attacks.

Back in Ottawa, Chandra met in an open-house over 60 members from the community, who over the years are donors and volunteers. At Help the Aged Canada, he met Mr. Pierre Barbeau, Executive Director, and Mr. Roderick Haney, International Development Project Advisor, CIDA. At the U of Ottawa Eye Institute, he met Dr. Karim Damji and Ms. Rosemary Bickerton, who had visited Srikan earlier. He visited Principal Burke, staff and students of St. Gregory School, who have been supporting Sarada since its inception in 1992. Chandra also visited St. Isidore School, met Principal Kryski, who visited Sarada in 2004, and addressed the students and staff.

In the grand rounds arranged by U of Toronto and ORBIS Canada, Dr. Peter Kertes from Sunnybrook & Women's Health Centre and Chandra gave a presentation on Srikan's role in preventing avoidable blindness in India.

While in Toronto, he met Mr. Eric Walters, an award-winning writer of children's books. Mr. Walters presented Chandra with a copy of his book, Run. Chandra also met Mr. Rajan Arora of Ellora Telecom, and several others who showed interest in promoting his activities in Canada and volunteering in India.

MY VISIT TO SRIKIRAN

SANJOY KUMAR GUPTA, MD, PhD, FRCSC

I would like to share with you some of my experiences during an inspirational trip to the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology this summer.

I'm a Canadian ophthalmologist practising in Thunder Bay for the past two years. I had met Chandra four years ago during a conference in Halifax and also heard of his pioneering work in Kakinada, through my mentors, Dr. Karim Damji (Ottawa), and Dr. Peter Kertes (Toronto). They had both enjoyed their visits to Srikiran in past years.

I had been experiencing a difficult challenge of my own here in North-Western Ontario and I thought I might find the solution in Srikiran. Most cataracts here in Canada are 'mild to moderate' and are removed using a technique known as 'phaco-emulsification'. The cataractous lens is broken up inside the eye using ultrasound and the small pieces are extracted by vacuum. This technique, along with the use of foldable lenses, allows us to carry out the entire surgery through a small incision of 2.8 mm.

In North-Western Ontario, I treat many patients of aboriginal origin, who live in remote communities that are often only accessible by air and seasonal 'winter roads'. These people are only prepared to have cataract surgery when their vision is not suitable for their work, and usually present with rock-hard white or brown cataracts. These are extremely difficult to remove by phaco-emulsification, as there is a higher risk of thermal/mechanical damage with higher ultrasound requirements and a higher risk of complications. I was convinced that for these 'rocks', the small-incision cataract surgery performed on a regular basis at Srikiran Institute was the answer, and the better surgical technique.

My trip from Visakhapatnam airport to Kakinada was enjoyable, and I was struck with the luscious green hills and fields of coastal Andhra Pradesh.

Dr Chandra greeted me on arrival at Srikiran and his sister had prepared a

wonderful meal, one of many that I was to experience over the course of the following days.

The following morning, I met the four ophthalmologists at Srikiran and prepared a plan for the days ahead. I had prepared some lectures for them for continuing medical education in advance, and they had also specific topics that they wished to review with me. I mentioned my aims to learn their technique of small-incision cataract surgery (or SICS), and they were more than willing to teach me.

I learned very quickly over the next few days, that no matter how advanced we are as ophthalmologists, the delivery of care depends on resources available. In medical ophthalmology, I learned that glaucoma and trauma are two epidemics in South India. In Canada, most glaucoma patients are well-controlled with drops that lower the pressure of the eye; however, in India, most people cannot afford these medications. For example, the cost of a widely used glaucoma medication, Xalatan, is equivalent to a month's wages! Without a nationwide health or drug plan, these villagers have to undergo surgical treatments for their glaucoma at an early stage.



Patients after surgery
Waiting for the bus to go home

I saw more trauma and infections caused from trauma to the eye, in four days in Srikiran, than I have seen in two years in Thunder Bay! Patients receive penetrating injuries to the eye while working in the fields, and only present when they can't see. These infections are severe, and are often a mixture of bacterial and fungal infections that are difficult to treat. These patients are often admitted to hospital, and cost of the treatment is borne entirely by the Srikiran Institute. The Srikiran Institute has just started a microbiology laboratory to help identify the organisms involved in these infectious cases and help in their treatment.

I was extremely impressed by the care provided to the large volume of cataract patients. The attending nurses are young and energetic: they address most of the patients as 'grandfather' and 'grandmother' and treat them with great respect. The patients arrive one day prior to surgery, given a bath and a meal at night, and the following morning are prepared for the surgery. The nurses in the operating room were quiet whirlwinds, working efficiently to put through the volume of patients in the course of the day.

The surgeons at Kakinada are comparable to any other world-class surgeons. They have honed their surgical skills to a fine art, and I was delighted to see such wonderful technique! My main teacher for small-incision cataract surgery was Dr. Thulasi, a petite and fantastic physician. She patiently taught me the skills required for small-incision cataract surgery. In turn, I demonstrated my surgical techniques in glaucoma, phaco-emulsification cataract surgery, and strabismus. We also had a few teaching sessions and discussions on the latest advances in the treatment of glaucoma and pediatric patients.

I was lucky enough to be present for the celebrations of the completion of 100,000 surgeries at Srikiran Institute. This is most certainly a milestone for any institution. In my mind, this could not have been achieved without the physical drive and initiative that Dr. Chandra provides, nor could this be achieved without the wonderful work ethic in the entire staff. The dedication that these young people

have to their work, and the care and compassion they provide to their patients is certainly inspirational.

I also visited the Sarada Vidyalayam which is an elementary school that is run by Dr. Chandra's sister. The school is located on the hospital campus, and the children were absolutely delightful. The classrooms were a model of discipline and hard work. The children were eager to show me their handwriting exercise books, math books and I was impressed at their neat work. The children had lunch together, which is also provided daily by the school. The fact that all children graduated in the past four years in First Class at the Regional Grade 7 exam is of course, no surprise! What a wonderful foundation for these young minds!

I hope that this article has given you an idea of the pioneering work that is being quietly carried out at the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology. My trip to Srikiran was certainly an inspirational one, and I hope to remain in close contact with this wonderful organisation.



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Celebrated 25 years of successful business with donations to three charities; MSMF is one of them. Thank You, Mr. Frank J. Coronado.

News from Kakinada

General

The campus electrical system is now connected directly to high-tension power on the local grid. That stabilizes the voltage level, and reduces the number of power outages and their duration. This in turn minimizes the dependency on the backup diesel generators.

Sarada Vidyalayam

The school reopened after summer holidays on June 9. All 11 grade seven students from last year successfully completed their examinations with high marks in the range of 89 to 94 percent. Out of the 11, six joined prestigious Andhra Pradesh residential high schools and the other five in the local high schools.

This year, there are 116 children enrolled in the seven grades, 84 of them are returning students and 32 new students, out of which 25 are in grade one. The school now has 11 teachers and two support staff.

The school has celebrated teachers' day on September 5 this year. On that day, they have honoured Mr. PVV Satyanarayana, the grade two and three math teacher, for his excellence in teaching, dedication and patience. On that occasion, all teachers were given gifts and a day off from their teaching duties. A selected group of students took over the classes and fulfilled the role of teachers.

All former students of Sarada have completed their grade 10 examinations and joined junior colleges. Among them, one female student, Penke Devi, scored 94% average, and received a scholarship to continue her education in a private college. Devi aspires to become a medical doctor.

From the first batch of grade one students from Sarada, some of them successfully completed their two-year junior college and one of them joined an undergraduate degree program, and three joined training programs at Srikiran.

We continue to monitor students who graduate from Sarada Vidyalayam and continue to support their future endeavors when possible.

Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology

This year's highlights include successful completion of the Prevention of Childhood Blindness Project funded by MSMF and CIDA; launching of Srikiran - ORBIS Pediatric Ophthalmology Program; historic achievement that the number of surgeries performed exceeded 100,000 mark; launching the Rotary International Cataract Surgery Project initiated by Dr. Kjell Dahlen; launching the screening of children from the tribal areas in East Godavari District with the cooperation of Integrated Tribal Development Agency. Dr. M. Rajenda, trained in Baroda, India, was appointed as a consultant in general ophthalmology.

Visitors

Visitors from Canada and the USA are our constant source of expertise, skills, and inspiration. We are fortunate to have the following visit us this year:

Canada

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|----------------------|---------------------|
| Mrs. Theresa Krsyski | Dr. Eswar Prasad |
| Mr. John Kryski | Mr. Terry Milewski |
| Dr. Karim Damji | Mr. Sat Nandalall |
| Ms. Salima Somji | Mr. Cedric Monteiro |
| | Dr. Sanjoy Gupta |

USA

| | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Dr. Kjell Dahlen | Dr. V.K. Raju |
| Mr. Gundam Gopal | Dr. Bhavani Prasad |

United Way Campaign

Now you can direct your United Way contributions to Manjari Sankurathri Memorial Foundation, Canada Revenue Agency BN 89002 4995 RR 0001. Thank You.

Please support MSMF generously ...

We urge you to support our education, eye care and disaster relief programs. Donations to MSMF qualify for tax credits in Canada. Donations to our partner organization, Eye Foundation of America (695 Westview Avenue, Morgantown, WV, 26505), qualify for tax exemption in the USA.

Thank You.

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