

Eye Clinics and Cataract Surgery Camps in Vanni

Eye Clinics by Dr Jeyapooranabala.

AssistRR trustee Dr Jeyapooranabala, who is an Eye Surgeon in the UK, have conducted eye clinics in Jaffna, Killinochchi, Puthukudiruppu and Mannar. He was able to see more than 600 patients in these clinics. In Jaffna, he held clinics in elderly home at Kaithady and SaiBaba centre in Nallur. He also held clinics at Kilinochchi hospital, Puthukudiyiruppu hospital, Murungan and Pesalai hospitals in Mannar. In these clinics, he was able to help patients with various eye problems such as Glaucoma, Diabetic retinopathy, dry eyes and corneal ulcers.

AssistRR also provided patients, who attended these clinics, with reading spectacles. So far, AssistRR have donated about 800 reading glasses. About 300 spectacles were given to people with reading problem by Dr Jeyapooranabala and the rest were donated to Killinochchi hospital and Vaddukkodai medical centre. Providing reading glasses help elderly people to see the names of their medicines and read necessary documents. .



Dr Jeyapooranabala handing over reading glasses in Kilinochchi

These clinics also helped to identify people who needed cataract surgery to improve their vision. There are many people in the war affected areas suffering from poor eye sight due to dense cataract. They will benefit by surgery and artificial lens implantation. AssistRR is committed to help these patients to have cataract surgery to improve their vision.

Cataract is the world's leading cause of blindness in adults over 55, with around 18 million people blind as a result. If left untreated, they can interfere with simple tasks such as reading. Although there is no way to prevent cataracts, it is possible to reduce the risk of losing sight from this disease. Someone experiencing the symptoms of cataracts or other vision problems, should see the doctor for a complete eye examination. If caught in the early stages when vision loss begins to interfere with everyday activities, cataracts can be removed quickly and good vision can be restored.



Patients at the eye clinic in Puthukudiyiruppu



Patients waiting at the eye clinic in Mannar



Dr Jeyapooranabala screening a patient in Mannar

Cataract Surgery Camps

During the visit in March 2013, AssistRR trustees met with WHO Vision 2020 organisers at the Health Ministry in Colombo and requested a cataract surgery clinic in Mannar. Vision 2020 program, which is arranged to perform cataract surgeries to eliminate treatable blindness to needy people, are organized by World Health Organisation in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka. The ministry provide surgeons, and other facilities except the lenses and other consumables. AssistRR agreed to provide funds for these items.

As a result, a cataract surgery camp was conducted on 1st & 2nd June 2013 in Mannar, which was organised by WHO 2020 programme office and was sponsored by Assist RR. This was jointly funded by friends of AssistRR in Australia, Gods Own Children Foundation. Nearly 90 patients were operated by eye surgeon, Dr Dias, who works at Batticaloa hospital. Assist RR admired his dedication and commitment to his profession. Dr Dias carried out the surgeries from 5AM until 10PM. The patients in Mannar were very pleased that Assist RR sponsored the camp and that Dr Dias carried out the surgery all day along successfully.



Cataract Surgery Camp in Mannar in June 2013



Patients waiting for the Cataract Surgery in Mannar in June 2013



Male patients waiting for the Cataract Surgery in Mannar in June 2013



Paarvathyamma from Mathalan coming out of cataract Surgery in Mannar in June 2013

Although cataract surgeries were originally planned for nearly 115 patients, the surgeon managed to perform only 93 surgeries on 02 June 2013. The health ministry therefore rearranged the remaining surgeries to be carried out at Jaffna hospital. Ten patients were taken to Jaffna on 7 June for the surgeries and we paid by AssistRR for their travelling to and from Jaffna.

Some of the patients in Mannar informed the doctors and AssistRR that there are still many people in and around Mannar who would require cataract surgery but was not aware of the camp in Mannar. AssistRR suspect that this would be the case in all districts. AssistRR therefore decided to organise eye clinics in the villages in Vanni to identify patients with cataract and other issues. WHO 2020 would be happy to organise surgery camps if there are enough patients available to run a camp. AssistRR also confirmed that they would sponsor future camps. Following a request from WHO 2020 programme office, AssistRR has agreed to sponsor a camp in Batticaloa in the near future.

Future Eye Projects

AssistRR recently made a personal request to Dr Dias, the eye surgeon at Batticaloa hospital, to volunteer to carry out surgeries at the AssistRR sponsored cataract surgery camps in Batticaloa and Mannar. He whole heartedly agreed to this request. During the conversation, he informed us that there are around 500,000 patients in the north and east needing cataract surgeries and the numbers increase by 10% every year. However, they are able to carry out only around 75,000 surgeries a year at government hospitals.

The main reasons for this scale of the problem are: awareness, poverty and lack of surgeons. We have been informed that there are only two surgeons in the North, covering Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, Mannar and Muullaithivu districts. Both surgeons are based in Jaffna and visit Vavuniya two days a week. This is why it is important for us to continue carrying out regular eye clinics and cataract surgery camps. We hope that you can appreciate the enormity of the problem in the North & East and why we should help the needy and vulnerable people to have their eye sights restored.

Following recent requests from patients and by the eye doctor in Mannar, Dr Priyatharsan, AssistRR is organising another cataract surgery camp in Mannar for nearly 150 patients. Friends of AssistRR in Australia and members of Gods Own Children Foundation, Australian Chapter, made an appeal for this camp and managed to raise enough funds for this camp. The camp will be conducted at Mannar hospital on 19th & 20th October 2013. Dr Dias from Batticaloa hospital has volunteered again to carry out the surgeries. Vision 2020 is looking for another surgeon so that all 150 patients can be operated at the camp.

Doctors and patients in Mullaithivu and Kilinichchi have also made requests to conduct a camp in these areas. We have been informed that there are already enough patients (more than 100 patients) for a camp. AssistRR took an 80 year old lady from Mathalan, Parvathyamma, for the surgery in Mannar in June 2013. She desperately needs surgery for her second eye, which is almost covered by cataract. There are many more patients like Parvathyamma in Mullaithivu. In addition to the above two camps, AssistRR has agreed to sponsor a camp in Batticaloa in the near future.

We appeal for more donations so that we can help these patients. It costs only around Rs 4000 per surgery. We are sure Diaspora families can afford to pay at least for one surgery, which would enable the needy to look after themselves in their old ages without relying on others.