

Where the need is great

In the space of just two weeks, volunteer health professionals, most from WA, worked flat out to relieve the burden of eye, medical and dental disease amongst villagers in isolated areas of India. The Eye Surgery Foundation once again sponsored Dr Stephen Colley and Dr Indran Chelvanayagan their 2nd and 3rd trip respectively. Another ophthalmologist Dr Hakki Sermirli, from Melbourne, joined the group for his first trip.

For some, this was a return trip to Kyatha Children's Home in Tirunelveli and the refuge for people with intellectual and physical disabilities in West Bengal's Anandaniketan. Two new base camp locations were an Ashram in Tiruchirappally ('Trichy') and a Bible College in Chennai.

Within these camps, 42 people from around Australia were organised by camp coordinator and optical dispenser Paul Clarke (the inspiration for this initiative called Equal Health) and three team leaders Brett Abbott (dentist), Andrew Heap (dentist) and Gillian Hurley (occupational therapist), all of whom have been on multiple trips.

With an estimated 400 million people living below the poverty line in India, 75% in rural areas, Steve Colley said the enormity of the problem is obvious to anyone visiting India.

■ An aphakic (cataract removal but no lens implant) patient has her eye sight restored with a new pair of high powered glasses.



"In an average day each team of two – dentist and dental nurse, doctor and nurse, or optometrist and optical dispenser – would see over a hundred people! The success of such an endeavour requires local support provided by Indian partners who help organise the acquisition and storage of medications, transport of team members, availability of interpreters and other logistics," he said.

"From a personal view point, there is nothing more satisfying than seeing the joy in the cataract patients' faces the day after they have undergone surgery. All the cataracts are mature and visually disabling."

"But I think all the team members feel uplifted by the welcome the orphan girls at Kyatha give each group when they visit. Everyone is given a flower lei and rousing applause on arrival!"

Planning for next year's trip is well underway. Anyone interested in being a team member, providing donations or just wanting to know more about Equal Health can email Paul Clarke at vision1@iinet.net.au.



■ Pictured left. Two surgeons operate in tandem in the main theatre at Rajan Eye Care (not much room to stretch).

■ Paul Clarke and Toni Leembruggen pose with a villager after surgery.

Eye Surgery Foundation

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- Awarded Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS) accreditation for four years.

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