

# Restoring vision, restoring hope: My experience as a medical student volunteer at a mega eye camp

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Tarun Kumar Suvvari<sup>1,2</sup>

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## Dear Editor,

The greatest gift you can give someone is the gift of sight.

Eye diseases and vision loss are significant public health concerns in India, where millions of people suffer from visual impairments.<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive eye care is a critical component of addressing the burden of eye diseases in India. It involves a broad range of services, including screening, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation. Comprehensive eye care services are essential to address the wide range of eye diseases, including cataracts, refractive errors, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy, among others.<sup>2</sup> Eye camps are an essential part of comprehensive eye care in India. They provide a platform to screen a large number of people for eye diseases and provide immediate treatment and referral to those in need. Eye camps are particularly useful in rural areas where access to healthcare services is limited, and people are often unable to afford the cost of treatment.<sup>3</sup>

As a medical student, I always wanted to volunteer for an eye camp. Finally, the opportunity came, and I got to participate in a mega eye camp. The experience was life-changing, and I realized the importance of eye care in people's lives. The eye camp was organized in a rural hospital and nearly 3000 patients attended a single day eye camp. Most of them were farmers who worked hard to make ends meet. They had no idea that their eye problems could be treated, and they had been living with them for years. When we arrived at the campsite, we were welcomed by a huge crowd of people waiting to get their eyes checked. We set up our tents and started the screening process.

The mega eye camp was supervised by ophthalmologists and staffed by a team of volunteers, including

medical students like myself. Patients were initially screened for visual impairment/vision loss followed by corneal and retinal diseases, glaucoma, and squint. Anyone diagnosed with cataracts was offered free surgical treatment, also free medications and spectacles were also provided for people diagnosed with other eye diseases. The volunteers ensured that patients received the necessary support and guidance during the camp to facilitate a hassle-free checkup process. It was heart-wrenching to see so many people with eye problems. Some of them had cataracts, while others had glaucoma, corneal ulcers, and poor vision other eye diseases. I observed that many individuals had cataracts, resulted in vision impairment. While cataracts can be readily identified and managed in urban settings, individuals residing in rural areas face significant challenges due to the lack of adequate medical infrastructure. Additionally, financial constraints often prevent them from seeking medical attention in nearby cities, thereby increasing the likelihood of cataracts progressing and causing blindness.

The mega eye camp was long and tiring, but we managed to screen and examine everyone. The surgeries were successful, and the patients were overjoyed to see the world clearly again. The happiness on their faces was priceless, and it made me realize the importance of restoring vision in people's lives. It was a surreal experience to see people who were suffering with vision loss, now able

<sup>1</sup>Rangaraya Medical College, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, India

<sup>2</sup>Squad Medicine and Research, Vizag, Andhra Pradesh, India

## Corresponding author:

Tarun Kumar Suvvari, Rangaraya Medical College, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh 533033, India.

Email: drtarunsuvvari@research@gmail.com



to see their loved ones and the world around them. The success of the camp was not just about restoring vision but also restoring hope. We educated people about the importance of eye care and how they can prevent eye problems. We also distributed free spectacles to those who needed them. The smiles on people's faces were heartwarming, and it made us realize the impact we had made in their lives.

In conclusion, my experience with eye camp was not just limited to screening eye problems, but it was also about learning the different eye problems and their treatments. We also learned about the importance of teamwork and how a group of people with different skills can come together to make a difference in people's lives. The experience also made me realize the importance of eye care in people's lives. Most of us take our eyesight for granted, but for those who have lost it, it is a life-changing experience. It made me appreciate the work that ophthalmologists do and the impact they have on people's lives.

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#### **Ethical approval**

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#### **Informed consent**

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