



VISION 2020 LATIN AMERICA
Report from January-September 2004

FIRST VISION 2020 IBEROAMERICAN CONGRESS BUENOS AIRES

The first Congress of this nature in the region was celebrated on August 27-28th in the beautiful City of Buenos Aires with a total of 350 participants, 40 presentations of original papers on community field work or research and 35 posters, which elicited animated discussions. Participants came from Cuba, El Salvador, Costa Rica, México, Ecuador, Brasil, Venezuela, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Perú and from all the Provinces in Argentina.

The objectives of the Congress were to increase the visibility and implications of the Program V2020-The Right to Sight as a worldwide effort to eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020. To promote the practice of community eye health, service delivery and research among young ophthalmologists in the region. To provide a platform for discussion, analysis and planning in the implementation of V2020 at district and national level. To seek coordination and partnership among institutions and individuals in the spirit of a south-south cooperation among countries in the region. To promote the utilization of appropriate technology in the fight against blindness. To share lessons learned, success stories and insights among participants. To create a network among participants who practice community eye health care and blindness prevention.

Topics covered areas like how to increase efficiency and efficacy in cataract surgical programs, how to subsidize cataract surgery, advancements in low vision care, RACSS results from Campinas and Venezuela, refractive error national programs, screening and treatment of diabetic retinopathy in a public health approach, ROP programs in LA and many other subjects, that we trust fulfilled the objectives set at the planning of the Congress.

Prizes were given to the cataract national program in Cuba by See International; to the Voss Center, a refractive error and low vision program in Buenos Aires by Orbis and to a low vision program in Campinas, Brazil by CBM-LARO.

The institutions cooperating in the Congress were WHO/PAHO, PAAO and IAPB with its members CBM, Orbis and See International. Alcon, Allergan and TACA contributed sponsoring participants.

President of the Congress: Prof. Hugo Nano

President of the Scientific Committee: Prof. Newton Kara Jose

Organizing Committee: Dr. Carlos Arieta, Lic. Maria E. Nano, Dr. Osvaldo Benítez

International Speakers:

- Dr. Serge Resnikoff, Head Blindness Division, WHO
- Dr. Ivo Kocur, Vision 2020 Global Coordinator

- Prof. Newton Kara Jose, Head of Ophthalmology Department, University of Campinas and University of Sao Paulo
- Dr. Francisco Contreras, Chair of the PBL Committee, PAAO
- Dr. Rainald Duerksen, Chair of the International Agency of Blindness Prevention Latin America
- Dr. Bronwyn Bateman, President Pan American Ophthalmology Association
- Dr. Juan C. Silva, WHO/PAHO Latin America Regional Advisor for Blindness Prevention

COMMUNITY EYE HEALTH COURSES IN LATIN AMERICA

Cuba: report presented by Lisa McDonald, CBM-LARO.

Following the second evaluation and planning workshop in Camaguey held in January 2003, the first course on Community Eye Health and 3rd. Workshop on Evaluation and Planning of the National Eye Health Programme was conducted in Holguin, 12th-15th, January 2004. Participants included 42 ophthalmologists coming from 17 hospitals from all 14 provinces of Cuba and the island Isla de La Juventud.

The workshop was facilitated by CBM's Medical Director, Dr. Allen Foster, Dr. Marie Aubin (Canada), Dr. Ivo Kocur, Coordinator of the Vision 2020 Programme of WHO and CBM's Regional Medical Adviser Dr. Felipe Chiriboga (Ecuador). CBM was represented by Martin Ruppenthal and Lisa Macdonald, from the Regional Office in Quito. Special guests included Dr. Jaime Alemañy (Head of National Ophthalmology Group MoH and Director of the Ophthalmology Dept. – Hospital Ameijeiras), Dr. Marcelino Rio (President of Cuban Society of Ophthalmology and Director of Hospital Pando Ferrer HPF), Dr. Dora Hitchmann (Low Vision; HPF), Dr. Mayra Mier (National Coordinator of the ROP control programme, HPF), Dr. Luis Nafeh Abirez, (Rep. MoH: National Ophthalmology Program) and representatives from CBM's partner organization Church Council of Cuba (Consejo de Iglesias CIC).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- Provision of tools for planning of community eye health programmes
- Presentation of results (Cataract & Glaucoma operations, ROP) – Statistics per hospital – 2003
- Enhancement of collaboration and involvement of local ophthalmologists, CIC and Ministry of Health to ensure progress of the National PBL program
- Focus on quality of cataract surgery
- Medium term planning by country, province, hospital (future needs, 3 year targets for surgeries)
- Planning for extension of program to include other hospitals (Moa, Manzanillo, Serrano Project) in the National Program

RESULTS

Present situation of eye health in Cuba

Cataract

Cuba (population 11,2 M; with 620 ophthalmologists) is advancing positively toward the goals of VISION 2020. Statistics presented by hospitals from Cuba East, West and

Central, showed the number of cataract surgeries increased from 10.800 in 2000 to almost 15.000 in 2003, with the percentage receiving an IOL increasing from 63 to 93% (Table 1). Improvement in numbers were particularly impressive in provinces outside Havana. The National Eye Health Programme aims to control blindness from cataract by 2010. A Rapid Assessment of Cataract Surgical Services (RACSS) study in 2004 will help direct programme activities towards the more underserved provinces and establish for a national baseline for future programme evaluation.

Table 1 Number of cataract surgeries in Cuba
(estimated 95 % of all cataract surgeries performed in Cuba)

Year	# surgeries	% IOL	CSR
2000	10.829	63	964
2001	11.267	69	1.003
2002	13.461	83	1.199
2003	14.710	93	1.310
V2020 Goal	33.000	> 98	3.000

Number of cataract surgeries could have been higher in 2003, however due to a epidemic of conjunctivitis the majority of hospitals closed their operating theatres for almost two months. Additionally, in Hospital Ameijeiras, Havana, no surgeries were performed for seven months due to problems with the central air conditioning.

Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)

Dr. Mayra Mier presented developments of the national program to prevent blindness from retinopathy of prematurity – co funded by Gertrude Hirzel Foundation and CBM – which aims at providing screening and treatment in all neonatal referral units in Cuba by the end of 2006. In 2003, 13 out of a total of 23 units were already involved in the program: 923 babies were screened and 13 treated for ROP.

Low Vision

Dra. Dora Hitchmann presented plans for the pilot low vision programme - initiated in 2003 in four of the fifteen provinces - currently being coordinated with the Ministries of Education and Health, with view of expansion over the next few years. The initiative includes awareness, screening in schools in 4 provinces & training, which was initially conducted in 2003, in Havana & Camaguey for 96 ophthalmologists & optometrists.

Second Community Eye Health Course in Quito, Ecuador

From August 31st. to September 3rd. the II CEH course was done in Yaruquí, Quito, Ecuador, under the auspices of the LSHTM, SSI, CBM, PAHO, IAPB and Fundación del Valle.

The course brought together 42 participants from Bolivia, Perú, Ecuador, Venezuela, Cuba and Colombia, who enjoyed learning the epidemiology of blinding diseases presented by Dr. Allen Foster and management issues presented by Dr. Thulsi, from Aravind Eye Institute. Other topics covered were community work from the experiences of the Fundación del Valle, refractive errors screening and treatment, formulation of eye health projects, ROP, low vision, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

Participants were guided to formulate district plans to provide eye services for 100,000 population, according to the following table prepared by Dr. Allen Foster:

Disease	Number per 100,000 population	Strategy
Blindness, Cataract and Refractive Errors		
Number of Blind People	500-600	Target cataract and refractive errors
Backlog of Cataract Eyes < 20/200	1,500 eyes	
Incidence of new Cataract eyes < 20/200	300eyes/yr	7-10 per week
Myopia/Astigmatism causing <20/40 bilateral vision	500 children aged 10 – 15 years	Screen age 10-15 with 20/40 bilateral
Presbyopia	20.000 people over age 45 yr need spectacles for near vision	Provide specs for near vision
Childhood Blindness and Visual Loss		
Childhood Blindness	20 children	Target cataract, ROP and low vision services
ROP	10-20 neonates need screening each year	Screen in neonatal units ? <2000grams
ROP	1-2 new cases need Rx each year	Treat with laser or cryo
Congenital cataract (and glaucoma)	4-5 cases per year	Screen newborns for red reflex, refer and operate.
Amblyopia/Strabismus	500 cases between ages 2 and 7 years	Case detection
Other blinding diseases		
Glaucoma	75 blind 500 with glaucoma	Case detection with presbyopia and cataract programmes
Diabetic Retinopathy.	3000-5000 Diabetics 1000 Diab Retinopathy 50-100/yr needed laser	Annual fundus examination of diabetics. Laser needed for treatment.

LOW VISION PROGRAMME

On March 13-15 and March 17-19 two low vision workshops were conducted in Bogotá, Colombia and Lima, Peru, under the technical and financial support of CBM, ONCE, PAHO and the IAPB LA regional office. A total of 48 participants including third year residents and ophthalmologists were exposed to the lectures of well know specialists in low vision like Dra. Elvira Martin, Dra. Lourdes Medina, Dra. Silvia Veitzman and local faculty.

The aims and objectives of these courses were to create awareness and motivate a group of residents in understanding the practice of low vision, make correct decisions in referring patients and works towards the creation of low vision units at main ophthalmology departments in the region.

At the same time a curricula was prepared to train a multidisciplinary team in low vision over a 30 days period. Training centres identified are the Instituto Conde de la Valenciana, Mexico DF, Fundación Laramara and Santa Casa de Misericordia in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

During 2004-2005, it is expected to train between two and four multidisciplinary teams and to open similar numbers of low vision units in the main cities of LA.

A set of visual aids were purchased as demonstration models from the Low Vision Center in Hong Kong. The equipment were found of good quality and with affordable prices for the region. Each country will be purchasing visual aids according to their needs.

RACSS STUDIES IN LATIN AMERICA

Rapid Assessment of Cataract Surgical Services surveys are being conducted in Latin America under the technical and financial support of WHO/PAHO and CBM offices. Buenos Aires, Campinas in Brazil and Venezuela are finishing their studies and the results will be available soon for publication. Piura, Perú, had finished the analysis of the data and the results will be published soon on the Journal of Public Health.

The RACSS methodology is a very useful tool to monitor indicators like prevalence of blindness, cataract surgical rate, quality of outputs and barriers to eye health care services.

Table prepared by Dr. Allen Foster

Parameter	Paraguay	Piura, Perú
Need		
Prev Blindness (<3/60) age 50+	3.1%	4.0%
Prev Cat Blind (<3/60) age 50+	2.0%	2.2%
% of blind due to cataract	64%	54%
Coverage		
Cataract coverage people <3/60	44%	24%
Cataract coverage people <6/60	36%	12%

Cataract coverage eyes <6/60	28%	8%
Outcome		
Poor outcome after surgery < 6/60 with an IOL	11%	23%

CHILDHOOD BLINDNESS IN LATIN AMERICA

Workshop in Tarija, Bolivia

Retinopathy of Prematurity is the first cause of childhood blindness in LA and also in Bolivia. To begin a program of early detection and treatment at neonatal units in the main cities of Bolivia, a national plan was formulated by a group of dedicated ophthalmologists and neonatologists that came together in Tarija, March 11-12, 2004, under the auspices of CBM and the National Ophthalmology Society in Bolivia. Dr. Gustavo Aguirre (h) is the leader of this novel group.

National ROP programmes in Argentina, Ecuador, Paraguay, Cuba, Colombia and Brazil

With the support of the LCIF, WHO/PAHO and IAPB several activities are taking place in these countries to implement ROP detection and treatment programmes. The main line of actions are training of ophthalmologists, neonatologists and nurses; the provision of equipment and educational campaigns involving the general public and public health authorities.

A regional ROP meeting will take place in May 2005 in Lima, Perú, to evaluate the progress made in the region in this program.

VISION 2020 AND NATIONAL OPHTHALMOLOGY SOCIETIES

Prevention of blindness workshops with the Colombian Ophthalmology Society

The Colombian Ophthalmology Society with its Blindness Prevention Committee headed by Dra. Luz Marina Melo, has been very active in promoting blindness prevention at several workshops done in Bogotá, Cali, Barranquilla and Medellín. At the same time, the National Ophthalmology Congress celebrated on August 4-7th. 2004 incorporated a section on PBL in each topic of the Congress, a breakthrough strategy to enhance the importance of prevention in the everyday practice of clinical and surgical ophthalmology.

Low vision workshop at the National Ophthalmology Congress in Huancayo and Arequipa, Peru

The practice of low vision is still largely neglected in most LA countries. In Perú, with the efforts done by Dra. Rosario Espinoza, the understanding and motivation to learn more of low vision is beginning to grow among colleagues of the Peruvian Ophthalmology Society. Low vision practice with the proper technology applied for rehabilitation of patients will provide an answer to the needs of a large volume of patients who felt short of the conventional treatment.

National Ophthalmology Congress in Venezuela

The National Congress of Ophthalmology in Caracas, Venezuela, celebrated on June 26-27, was opened to the presentation of Vision 2020-The Right to Sight.

Dr. Rainald Duerksen, Chair of IAPB Latin America and Dr. Felipe Chiriboga, CBM Medical Advisor, were present at the Congress to share the vision, mission and expected results of the program in the region.

Prevention of Blindness Seminar in Cuenca, Ecuador

Dr. Felipe Chiriboga, Head of the Blindness Prevention Committee at the National Ophthalmology Society in Ecuador, conducted a seminar on the minimal incision technique for cataract surgery in Cuenca, Ecuador. This presentation elicited great interest among participants for the excellent results and low costs involved in the technique.

Refractive error campaign and surgery of strabismus, ptosis and congenital cataract in Paraguay

The national refractive error program called “Ver para Aprender”, conducted under the coordination of the National Vision 2020 Committee and Plan International in Paraguay, had screened 98.000 children from rural schools, provided 1.220 corrective spectacles and done surgery to 110 children with strabismus, congenital cataract and ptosis. In this program, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the National Ophthalmology Society and local NGOs are cooperating closely in the National Vision 2020 Committee.

PARTNERSHIPS

- ❑ The Pan American Ophthalmology Association-PAAO-had appointed its President, Dra. Bronwyn Bateman, as Representative of PAAO in the Vision 2020 Regional Working Group. Dr. Francisco Martinez Castro has been appointed as Active Member to further the cooperation among National Ophthalmology Associations in the region and its individual members with V2020 and Dr. Francisco Contreras continues to be the Chair of the Blindness Prevention Committee at the PAAO Board of Directors. PAAO and IAPB Officers will be meeting in New Orleans to discuss policies and strategies in the implementation of Vision 2020 in the region.
- ❑ See International and Orbis have been accepted as new Members of the Vision 2020 LA RWG. We welcome their expertise and commitment towards the advancement of Vision 2020 in the region.
- ❑ Bireme, a virtual library widely searched in LA, had opened a space for eye health and Vision 2020. The Journal of Community Eye Health has already a link with this library and we hope to have full translations into Spanish of the articles in this Journal.