

Alcon's PD program celebrates 10 years of helping people see better

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Phaco Development (PD) program, a unique initiative between Alcon and specialist training institutes that builds cataract surgical capabilities across Asia and Russia is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. Over the last decade, the Alcon Phaco Development program (PD), along with its partner faculty & partner institutes, has supported eye care surgeons to build sustainable practices in local communities in countries like India, China, Vietnam, and Bangladesh. Introduced in India in 2010, the program has helped more than 1500 eye surgeons and a million people regain their sight.

India has among the world's highest proportion of blind people (numbering nearly 12 million) against 36 million globally which makes India home to one-third of the world's blind population. Lack of skilled professionals when it comes to number of ophthalmologists is one of the main reasons for the lack of quality eye care services in the country. In India, there are an estimated 18,000 ophthalmologists which is well below the World Health Organization's recommended ratio of 1 ophthalmologist per 25,000 population.

The PD program is dedicated platform for providing the most up-to-date eye knowledge to ophthalmic surgeons and support teams globally. PD program aims to establish sustainable cataract care practices by helping surgeons learn and adopt the latest techniques for advanced cataract procedure and strengthen the capabilities of surgical teams in communities. The strength of the program comes from its partnerships and dedication to improving eye surgery outcomes for patients. In India, Alcon partners with 'Centres for Excellence' such as key teaching institutions like Aravind Eye Care Hospitals, LV Prasad Eye Institute, Dr Shroff Charity Eye Hospital, Shri Sadguru Seva Sangh Trust, ICARE Eye Hospital, Susrut Eye Foundation etc. across states. These institutes host the initial training and house the wet labs on their premises. The program provides the support team, the surgical equipment and consumables for the learning.

"The program is aligned to "Skill India" campaign launched by The Prime minister of India in 2015. This program is helping in capacity building & skilling eye care professionals in far flung areas enabling them to serve the unserved and the underserved for their unmet eye care needs. Thanks to the hard work of our consultant ophthalmologists and partner institutes, the unique Phaco Development program has helped bring sight back to a million people in India over the last 8 years.", says Dr Rashmi Rani – Alcon's Head of the Phaco Development Program across South East Asia. "Some make the assumption you can graduate from medical school and immediately do challenging eye surgery but it's not that simple. Just like driving a car, you have to practice to improve and gain confidence. Our program ensures physicians get the practice and support they need to do effective, quality surgeries in their hometowns, and closer to their patients."

Dr. Umang Mathur, Cornea and Phaco cataract surgeon from Dr. Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital says, "The initiative is one-of-its kind partnership to support the development of practicing ophthalmologists through an innovative education and training program. In partnership with the institutes, the program provides eye surgeons with an excellent support system which ensures successful implementation of the techniques in order to help ophthalmologists after the program to shift from

conventional surgical techniques such as small incision cataract surgery to what is now the global standard, phacoemulsification cataract surgery.”

The practical training approach starts with pre-course support and a 4 to 11-day intensive training program that combines both theory and wet lab experiences (hands-on surgical practice with artificial eyes. An experienced Consultant ophthalmic surgeon leads this part of the training with the Phaco Development program specialists assisting participants with the surgical equipment in the wet lab

Once the program participant's graduate from the course, the Phaco Development program team accompanies the ophthalmologists to their local clinic or hospital and works alongside them providing the support needed to improve their confidence in surgical pathway and equipment use. This follow-up support happens over a period of up to six months.

Since 2008, the program has enrolled over 2500 ophthalmic surgeons across Asia and Russia who have performed almost 3 million patients regain their eyesight worldwide.

The World Health Organization indicates that having a cataract is one of the top two causes of vision impairment globally. In low to middle-income countries it is a leading cause of blindness. Unfortunately, almost 18 million people globally are blinded in both eye's due to having cataracts. The International Association for the Prevention of Blindness estimates that one ophthalmologist should be able to complete up to 2,000 cataract surgeries per year, when they have the right infrastructure and support team in place, and patients can access the facility.