

SightLife restores sight of 1,00,000 individuals since its inception

29 May 2019 | News

Nonprofit global health organization reaches historic milestone after 10 years of work in the country



SightLife, the US-based global nonprofit has announced that together with its partners in India, 100,000 individuals suffering from corneal blindness have had their sight restored through a corneal transplant in the last ten years since operations began in India. SightLife is a nonprofit global health organization dedicated to eliminating corneal blindness by 2040.

“We are incredibly proud of this milestone because it’s a testament of the hard work by our partners and supporters in India over the last decade,” said CEO Claire Bonilla. “But more importantly, it means that 100,000 individuals have not only had their sight restored, but also their independence and livelihood, which ultimately contributes to a better and more sustainable world for future generations.”

“This is a monumental achievement and exemplary of the importance of partnership in eliminating corneal blindness,” said Eye Bank Association of India (EBAI) President, Dr. Gobinda Mukherjee.

SightLife commenced operations in India to address the rapidly growing number of corneal blind in the country, estimated at more than six million. Corneal blindness is one of the most common causes of blindness in India. Leveraging decades of experience in the US, SightLife built its global programs which focus on advocating for policy change to increase access to donors and care, preventing corneal blindness, training corneal care providers to ensure access to quality care, strengthening eye banking systems to increase the number of high-quality transplantable corneas, and creating access to innovative solutions.

“SightLife is compassionately changing lives by transforming health systems to treat preventable blindness and restore sight,” said SightLife Vice President, Atul Kapoor. “Across India, we collaborate with 23 partners – eye bank institutions, hospitals, government organizations, nonprofits, and the Eye Bank Association of India, working together to achieve our mission of eliminating corneal blindness worldwide by 2040.”

In late 2016, SightLife partnered with King George Medical University (KGMU) and The Hans Foundation (THF) to open a

state-of-the-art eye bank and center of excellence in Uttar Pradesh – the KGMU UP Community Eye Bank. The eye bank provides a full scope of services, including counseling for families, cornea recovery and processing, distribution of corneal tissue to surgeons and training for technicians and surgeons. The year before the eye bank opened, only 650 transplants were performed across the whole state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). In its first year, the eye bank facilitated over 400 transplants and to date has provided tissues for sight restoring surgeries for more than 1,350 individuals.

“We’ve made significant progress, but there is a lot of work ahead,” said Anurag Taneja, SightLife Director of Partner Account Management. “To truly eliminate corneal blindness, we must continue to foster partnerships for sustainable development, bring new, innovative products and technologies to more people, and scale models that work in India and beyond.”

There are 12.7 million people in the world needlessly suffering from corneal blindness, which is the scarring of the cornea caused by disease or injury. This condition goes beyond not being able to see the world around you or the faces of your loved ones; it could mean falling out of the education system, becoming unemployed, or being unable to care for your family. But there is hope – 80 percent of corneal blindness is preventable or treatable. Through its multi-faceted programs, SightLife is on a mission to reach these 12.7 million by continuing to exponentially scale their work in India and around the world.