

ISSUE 2 SEPTEMBER 2020

# InSight

## FREE SURGERIES FOR PATIENTS WITH DIABETES

*Newest Charity Initiative!*

## NEW DOCTOR ALERT

*From England to Trinidad*

## PARTNERSHIP WITH ANTIGUA

*Surgeries in Antigua*



# Our Sight Saving Journey Continues



COVER IMAGE:  
Dr. Akil Hinds and a patient.

Photo Courtesy:  
Jonathan Albert Photography

INSIGHT IS A PUBLICATION OF TRINIDAD EYE HOSPITAL.

Trinidad Eye Hospital is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to make the world a better place by restoring sight for those who have lost their vision, their dignity and their hope. All services are free and made possible by its main sponsor Caribbean Vitreous & Retina Surgery Ltd (CVRS).

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We, at Trinidad Eye Hospital (TEH), are so grateful for the opportunity to continue sharing our story with you in this second issue of our InSight newsletter. Our experience in the past 12 months has been filled with so much joy as we continue our eyecare transformation journey and are brimming with excitement to share it all with you, our dear readers, patients and partners in eyecare.

This year the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted some of our plans but really got us thinking more about the future. We ask ourselves: how can we extend our eyecare services to those facing financial hardship? There's so much we can do and we are going for it!

Blindness can be avoidable once patients receive the care that they need in a timely manner. In this issue, you will discover, that Trinidad Eye Hospital's commitment is strengthening, as we make even greater efforts to increase the accessibility to free eye care solutions for the vulnerable groups in our country and region. We would like to thank to our primary sponsor company Caribbean Vitreous and Retina Surgery Ltd. (CVRS) and our network of sponsors for making this all possible.

*Anura & Franka*  
EDITORS

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# Greetings From Our Chairman

*By: Dr. Ronnie Bhola FRCS(Ed), CCT (UK)*

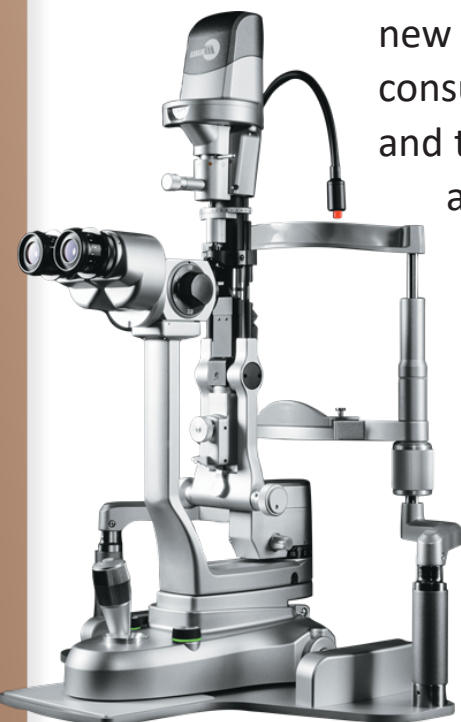
The year 2020 has been a life changing year for all of us. The Covid 19 pandemic took the world by surprise and left us all shellshocked, facing the reality of how quickly and drastically the world can change.

Leadership in healthcare continues to be tested all over the world and the responsibility to face these challenges is critical. It is no different for us in eyecare. We have had to show our agility and ability to conform to the new norm to ensure that preservation of patient's eyesight remains at the forefront of our minds.



Both CVRS and Trinidad Eye Hospital have had to adapt to the new rules of care with social distancing at clinics, telephone consultations and lots of personal protective gear. Our doctors and technicians have shown their resilience and we consider it a blessing to experience their level of dedication to serving patients the best possible care every step of the way.

Last year we made strides in our efforts to grow our corporate sponsorship network which funded 6 vitrectomy surgeries for patients with diabetes under our first ever Sight Saver Initiative. This brings the number of charity surgeries delivered to a total of 158 since 2016. This is a something we are truly proud of. Our sponsors have been generous and it is humbling that they choose to continue on this journey with us.



We are not discouraged by the events of 2020 but rather, we are hopeful, as we stay the course to growing all our TEH Charitable Programmes not only in our country but in the Caribbean Region. This is our life's purpose and our inspiration comes from our patients who experience the joy of sight every single day. Our partners, sponsors and well-wishers also hold a special place in our hearts at TEH as we strive to attain 'a world where everyone sees'.

# A Message From The General Manager

*By: Celia Jaikissoon*

It has been a pleasure to witness the growth that both CVRS and Trinidad Eye Hospital has experienced within the last year. Our staff is a team! A team of exceptionally hardworking and dedicated individuals, who give their time tirelessly to ensure patient care remains our number one priority. Our organization could not make an impact without each of these individuals contributing in their own way. I owe them all a very very special Thank You!

As the General Manager, plans are on the way to expand our infrastructure so that we can improve of our patients' experience in the future. We are scheduled to move our San Fernando operations to a much needed 'larger' facility to accommodate our patients more comfortably. Our plan is to accomplish this move before the end of this year.

Plans are also on the way to construct a state-of- the-art Eye Surgery Centre in central Trinidad where we can offer our patients greater accessibility to receive their eye surgeries. We are hopeful about the future.

Although Covid-19 has set us back a bit, we know that 'service to others' is one mission that will remain a priority for us, and so I look forward to the continuation of this wonderful journey.







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Dr. Ronnie Bholra FRCS (Ed), CCT (UK) | Dr. Dorian Dwarika MRCS (Ed)  
Dr. Vineeth Kumar FRCS (Ed) | Dr. Z. Mohammed MBBS | Dr. V. Badasee MBBS

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Website: [www.trinidadeyehospital.org](http://www.trinidadeyehospital.org)

Our newest Consultant Ophthalmologist and Surgeon, Dr. B. Vineeth Kumar shares his story, his journey in Ophthalmology. Dr. Kumar is passionate about reducing blindness due to diabetes and serves as Trinidad Eye Hospital's Clinical Lead for our Diabetic Eye Screening Program (DESP).

## Dr. B. Vineeth Kumar My Story In Ophthalmology

I would like to share my journey in ophthalmology for the last 24 years through these few words.

Words are powerful, and even more powerful is a song that resonates within your soul. For me, this song is Abba's "I have a dream" released in 1979. I have always loved this song and whenever I needed a rush of adrenaline, I'd listen to this song.

Sitting on a beach in the tiny Caribbean island of Trinidad – thousands of miles from India and England, soaking up the sunshine, solitude, sea and fresh air, I realized why this song embodies everything I think about in ophthalmology and my journey in life.



Seeds for my ophthalmology career were laid in medical school's internship in India when I was posted to work in an eye camp. Spending time in the eye camp and realising the benefit of intervention for cataracts in the people we operated on, created a spark within me. It was indeed magic and I knew this was going to be my path.

I left my homeland of India and journeyed to the United Kingdom, where after completing the necessary exams, embarking on a career of Ophthalmology felt like

*"I have a dream, a song to sing"*



The challenges of training in a foreign land were difficult and interesting but I persevered and the words ringing in my ears were:

*“ To help me cope with anything,  
If you see the wonder of a fairy tale,  
You can take the future even if you fail.  
I believe in angels ”*

There were many angels who helped me grow as an ophthalmologist and continue to do so.

With the training in my bag I started on as a Consultant at Wirral University Teaching Hospital in the United Kingdom. I had the opportunity to learn about not just ophthalmology but leadership, managing teams, delivering projects and with time I realised that these skills are essential for delivery of my dream.



I got an opportunity to participate in public health ophthalmology projects and attending a meeting in 2012 felt like homecoming. This was the moment that my path and goals were beginning to become more clear and felt like:

*“ When I know the time is right for me,  
I'll cross the stream, I have a dream. ”*



Throughout my career in ophthalmology, I was fortunate to be surrounded by people who influenced me believing in my dream and singing the same song as me.

This journey took me to many countries and I was richer in the experience which can be summed up as:

*“ I have a dream, a fantasy”*

I have not spoken much about "my dream" as I knew I was on the right path but "my dream" sometimes was not always clear. With time and reflection, I've realised that "my dream" is to reduce avoidable blindness. This, after discussion with my friend Dr. Ronnie Bholra, seemed to find synergy with his mission and work in Trinidad. I was invited to spend some time here in Trinidad during my sabbatical, to see for myself his dream at work at Trinidad Eye Hospital/CVRS. My experience here was definitely life-changing as it influenced me to resign my role as a Consultant in the UK and head west, halfway across the world, to Trinidad to take up a new role within the Trinidad Eye Hospital/CVRS organization and the words that echo my feelings:

*“ Pushing through the darkness still another mile,  
I believe in angels,  
Something good in everything I see. ”*



I am happy to be part of the Trinidad Eye Hospital/CVRS team on this next chapter in the story of "my dream". We as a team are on a journey and I look forward to learning at every step and continue realising my dream further. I strive towards my goals of reducing avoidable blindness and training future ophthalmologists for them to dream as well. I'll close this introduction of me with the following few lines:

*“I believe in angels,  
I have a dream, a song to sing,  
When I know the time is right for me,  
I'll cross the stream, I have a dream  
I'll cross the stream, I have a dream.”*



# DESP Update

By: Lee Ann Lazarus

Trinidad Eye Hospital's Diabetic Eye Screening Program (DESP) has developed greatly from 2018 to present. The greatest development being that the program is now **FREE** to all diabetics throughout the country in keeping with our mission of making quality eye care available for all.

The program has grown with the development of our outreach programs which would include partnerships with groups such as:

- Diabetes Association of Trinidad and Tobago (DATT)
- Lion's Club International
- Regional Corporations throughout Trinidad
- Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and Social Welfare Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service



Working with these various groups has allowed for the message of our DESP to be spread to areas of the country that we would not have been able to reach before.

These outreach clinics have shown that there is a definite need for the program as is shown by the referral rate to ophthalmologists of 1 in 5. The aim of screening is to identify changes early and so reduce this referral rate and prevent sight loss due to diabetes

Another huge development for DESP is the clinical lead for the program, Dr. Vineeth Kumar being brought on full time from the United Kingdom. Dr. Kumar has years of experience from his previous position as clinical lead for the UK Diabetic Eye Screening Program (UK DESP) for over a decade. We have been truly blessed to have access to his knowledge base and his experience to guide and develop the program as we grow in the years to come.



## DIABETIC EYE SCREENING PROGRAM (DESP)

**FREE FOR ALL PERSONS WITH DIABETES**

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# 12 Questions With: Consultant Ophthalmologist & Surgeon Dr. Dorian Dwarika



## 1. Who is Dorian Dwarika - the man, the doctor, the surgeon?

I would say that I am an eye doctor who does retinal surgery and a family man who looks after my son. Since I was young, I enjoyed the artistry of playing music especially the keyboards and guitar. I also am a man of science, I have a background in mathematics, biology and physics, all of which I enjoy. I also like watching and playing sports, mainly football and tennis.

## 2. Why did you choose to become an ophthalmologist?

I find the eye is an easy part of the body to examine with a microscope. I like the precision by which this area of medicine is defined unlike other areas I would describe as more abstract. I noticed that my aptitude and skills developed over time for this area so it is a nice field for me to use my talent.

## 3. Why do you like being a part of the CVRS and Trinidad Eye Hospital team?

We have some lofty goals as a team to provide high quality eyecare for our country and it is sorely needed. CVRS and TEH allows us to see a very high volume of patients with eye disease and this helps us to become very strong in our case management and treatment of patients. It's like we are training for the Olympics. We are actually doing so many complex cases that they are becoming routine and the routine cases almost pedestrian. This means that, thanks to the many patients we see, we are increasing the quality of the service that we offer exponentially as the level of our skill development on a daily basis is extremely high.

## 4. For you, what are the most challenging facets of being an eye surgeon?

Dealing with things that one cannot change is particularly challenging. The mortality of a human being is one of those things and it is just something we have to accept. Dealing with feelings and trying to hold patients' hands through their treatment process can also be difficult at times especially when so many cannot afford the care that they need.

## 5. What is one thing that you've learned from your experience so far?

Life is not always what it seems to be. We are part of a much bigger game. Practicing ophthalmology every day doesn't happen by chance. There are so many external factors that we used to feel we have to accept, however, we have learned to push the boundaries and fight for the outcomes that we want, using the tools and talents that we have been given.





**6. Can you share any insights about managing patients with glaucoma and the corrective surgical procedures that you often perform?**

As ophthalmologists, Glaucoma has always been tricky for us to fully understand. What we do know is that regular follow up and regular management of the disease is the best way to reduce permanent sight loss due to Glaucoma.

As a result Glaucoma patients should:

- Test often
- Keep Appointments
- Follow Doctor's instructions

High risk patients including those with the disease in their families should be examined regularly. Controlling 'Eye Pressure' lowers the chances of sight loss in Glaucoma patients and the sophisticated eye drops that are now available do a good job at keeping such things under control.



**7. What do you think most of your patients would say about you?**

Some say "Dr. I like your beard where did it go", while others say "Dr. I like you without the beard, keep shaving."

**8. How do you spend your leisure time?**

I like spending time with my family and playing music.

**9. What is one thing that most people don't know about you?**

I once drove 200 miles to play the piano at

a gig in a Pub in England during the Christmas holidays. It was a great memory, except for the part where I got chicken pox the next day.

**10. While in the operating theatre, what do you prefer – music/no music?**

Music is mandatory.

**11. What would your advice be to other doctors looking to make a positive impact on their communities?**

Long gone are the days when you look up to yourself like the doctor who knows it all. Doctors should use a more evidenced-based method of practice to help patients. Don't strive to be on a pedestal or wait for a single colossal case to make your name. Use evidence to become good at the practice of medicine by seeing many patients and refining your skills. Helping patients is a by-product of how good you can become at the job that you do. Push the frontiers and you will make patients happy as a result.

**12. Do you have any final thoughts to share on the outlook for Trinidad Eye Hospital and CVRS?**

The whole existence of TEH is to help many people. We can learn more about eye disease when we help more patients. As doctors helping high volumes of patients at CVRS and TEH, we learn so much that it increases our speed of diagnosis, our understanding of disease patterns and allows us to perform quicker more precise surgery.

We will offer patients excellent care, but also push boundaries so we can understand the physical eye as best as possible. Then we will combine our expertise with just the right amount of human caring to make the difference in our patients' lives.





# Making A Difference With Community Outreach

*By: Ibraheem Mohammed*



Growing up in a rural area of Trinidad, I realised that eye care services were not easily available or accessible. I decided to become an optometrist because it was my opportunity to help people. I realised that through something as simple as wearing glasses, someone's entire life and outlook can be improved just by this improvement of vision. I believe that, once needed, a pair of spectacles is a basic necessity that can greatly affect the quality of life.

No matter the island or country, there is always a demand for eyecare services. There is a worldwide trend in which third world countries tend to suffer from a lack of basic eye care.

The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that the number one cause of blindness in the world is refractive error, with cataract and glaucoma, as the next two major causes.

Visual problems are not limited based on age, gender or medical conditions. Younger kids may benefit from early detection and diagnosis of certain eye conditions. In some



cases a routine eye examination may pick up underlying health conditions such as diabetes or hypertension. Later in life correcting refractive error in patients can help sustain independence, reduce social isolating and support patient's overall health.

It is difficult to know that many of the persons in certain parts of the country cannot afford eye care they need nor a basic pair of spectacles. Just imagine how poor eyesight can affect your ability to work and earn a living. To make things worse during this COVID-19 pandemic, many more people are unemployed or under financial constraints.

On average, an outreach clinic done by the Trinidad Eye Hospital can have 50 to 100 people attending. When performing a vision screening, our eyecare professionals work diligently under any conditions available to perform a comprehensive eye examination. Our services include, visual acuity testing, intra-ocular pressure check and fundus examination as well as education/counselling when needed.





Outreach clinics and vision screening services need to be restarted within the local communities to help quell the growing number of preventable blindness cases.

Our professionals must learn to adapt and work around these constraints to provide the best care for all persons.

Now more than ever, eyecare professionals need to work together in assisting our people during these trying times. We are not in this fight alone. We need to come together and help those who cannot afford glasses.



**THERE IS NO BETTER WAY TO  
THANK GOD FOR YOUR SIGHT  
THAN BY GIVING A HELPING  
HAND TO SOMEONE TO  
SOMEONE IN THE DARK**

*- Hellen Keller*



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# Charity Initiatives

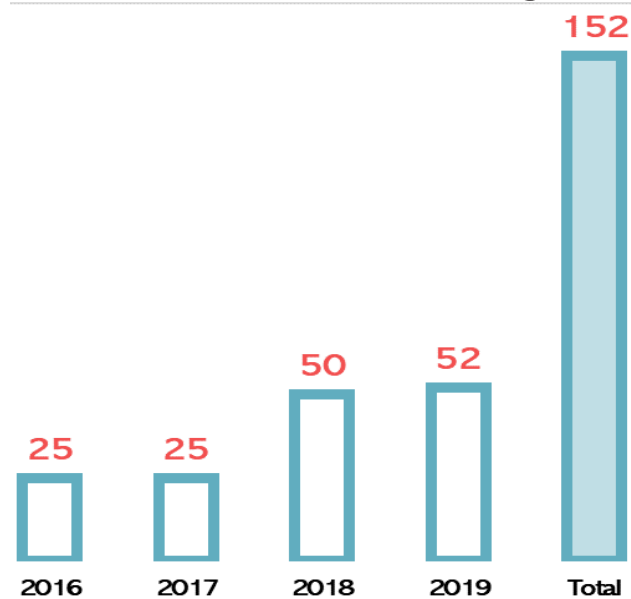
## Gift Of Sight & Christmas In July Charity Cataract Initiative

These are the signature charity events of Trinidad Eye Hospital which provide free cataract surgeries for patients. A cataract is the clouding of the lens of the eye commonly caused by aging. Cataract surgery, also called lens replacement surgery, is the removal of the natural lens of the eye (also called "crystalline lens") that has developed an opacification, and it is replaced with an intraocular lens.

According to WHO, 48% of world blindness is due to cataract. The average cost of a cataract surgery is \$TT12,000 and many are unable to afford the cost of this procedure.

Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, for the period 2016 to 2019, a total of 152 cataract surgeries were done for free as shown in the graph below.

**Number of Free Cataract Surgeries**



For our Christmas in July 2019 Charity Event, Trinidad Eye Hospital was fortunate to have three visiting ophthalmologists from different parts of the Caribbean and even from the United States. They were delighted to be a part of our free cataract surgery initiative and volunteer their time to help perform surgery when needed.



▲ Dr. Arindel Maharaj, Consultant Ophthalmologist from Bascom Palmer Eye Institute Miami, performs surgery with the team.



“ I’m originally from Rio Claro and I’m currently practicing at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami. I was always looking for a way to give back to Trinidad and Ronnie presented this opportunity a couple years ago. I’m excited and it’s been a nice day contributing to this. ”

DR. ARINDEL MAHARAJ  
Consultant Ophthalmologist, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, United States



“ It’s been such a pleasure. I have been collaborating with Ronnie for the last couple years as he helps our retinal patients in Guyana ”

DR. SHAILENDRA SUGRIM  
Head of Ophthalmology, Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, Guyana



“ I’m happy to help out! ”

DR. DIONISIO CHARRAN  
Ocular Electrophysicist, Dominican Republic





# Sight Saver

## Vitreectomy Surgery Charity Initiative

According to the International Diabetes Federation, approximately 463 million people have diabetes in the world and more than 44.3 million people in the North American and Caribbean Region. This will rise to 60.5 million by the year 2040. There are approximately 200,000 persons with diabetes in Trinidad and Tobago.

Persons with diabetes are at risk of damage from diabetic retinopathy, a condition that can lead to sight loss if it's not treated. It occurs when diabetes affects small blood vessels, damaging the part of the eye called the retina. These changes can go unnoticed until they are well advanced and may threaten many persons' eyesight.

Approximately 1000 persons with diabetes in Trinidad and Tobago require vitrectomy surgery each year to repair this damage if not caught in time for treatment by non-surgical methods. In December 2019, TEH introduced its first charity programme for vitrectomy surgeries. Sponsor donations allowed for six (6) patients to have surgery completed for free. These procedures cost an average of \$30,000 to \$35,000 each.

Patients could not be happier having had the costly procedures completed at no cost to them, giving them a chance at saving their eyesight and restoring their independence.



*“ I just wanted to make out people’s faces and even read.*

*I want to say thanks because I got help.*

*I’m so thankful and I hope you help other people like myself. ”*

MS. PAMELA BOODRAM  
Charity Vitrectomy Surgery Recipient

## Our Sponsors



*“ We have been supporting the Trinidad Eye Hospital’s charity surgeries since inception.*

*It’s all about giving back – patients need that support, doctors need that support as well as our country.*

*It’s nice to give back, it’s nice that at the end of the day a patient can receive that gift of sight. ”*

MR. SUNIL MOONESAR

Managing Director, Eye See You Ophthalmic and Medical Supplies Limited



*“ We are pleased to be a sponsor of these charity surgery events. We have been a sponsor in the past and will continue to be in the future ”*

MR. DAYNE AGUILERA

General Manager, Caribbean Ophthalmic Solutions



*“ We are happy to know that six patients benefitted from our donation ”*

MS. CANDACE BERNARD PETERS

Marketing Administrator, The Maritime Financial Group





# Growing Partnerships

## Sponsorships, Donations & Sponsor Appreciation Dinner

Caribbean Vitreous & Retina Surgery Ltd (CVRS) has been the proud majority sponsor of Trinidad Eye Hospital charity surgery initiatives, delivering 152 cataract surgeries together with sponsorship from GoodHealth Medical Centre, Eye See You Ophthalmics Limited and others, since 2016.

In December 2019, 25 very generous companies and friends of TEH continued the sight saving journey with us to sponsor 6 vitrectomy eye surgeries for patients in need. We are so grateful to each of our 25 extraordinary sponsors, who make all our charity programmes possible.

On Friday 17th January 2020, we had the honour of hosting our 1st Sponsor Appreciation Dinner at Estate 101, Maraval, to spend time with our sponsors and share in the joy of the work we have done together for persons in need.

### OUR SPONSORS







# Trinidad Eye Hospital

## Help Those In Need **DONATE!**

<b>SURGERY</b>	<b>DIABETIC EYE SCREENING PROGRAM (DESP)</b>	<b>OUTREACH</b>	<b>SURGERY CENTRE</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b>
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<b>Monthly Donation</b> <b>MD</b>	<b>Yearly Donation</b> <b>YD</b>	<b>Customised Donation</b> <b>CD</b>	<b>Patient-Based Donation</b> <b>PD</b>
<b>Monthly Donation</b> < \$1000 per month \$1000 per month > \$1000 per month	<b>Yearly Donation</b> < \$10,000 per month \$10,000 per month > \$10,000 per month	<b>Customised Donation</b> A specially designed donation option to suit your personal preference.	<b>Patient-Based Donation</b> A donation request made specifically on behalf of a patient in urgent need and sent on a case-by-case basis.

TO LEARN MORE, CONTACT:  
Stakeholder Engagement Manager  
+1 868 794 1026  
Email: [donate@trinidadseyehospital.org](mailto:donate@trinidadseyehospital.org)

## Knowledge Sharing

### Ophthalmologists Academic Sessions



On February 27<sup>th</sup> 2020, Trinidad Eye Hospital was pleased to welcome three visiting ophthalmologists from the United Kingdom to present and participate in one of our Ophthalmologists' Academic Sessions held at Valpark Chinese Restaurant. This session, sponsored by Oscar Francois Limited and CVRS, welcomed Dr. Sid Goel and Dr. Say Aun Quah from the Eye Correction Centre, UK and Dr. Nandan Haldipur from Doncaster Vascular Centre, UK as well as many local senior consultant ophthalmologists.

These sessions, aimed at sharing knowledge and experiences with junior ophthalmologist, consists of presentations, case studies and panel discussions. This format encourages participation and discussions allowing learning through different opinions and methods.



Trinidad Eye Hospital is pleased to host these sessions that help inspire and grow young ophthalmologists.



### Moran's Global Outreach Division Visits SFGH in Trinidad To Do Free Cataract Surgeries

On Monday 5th August to Friday 9th August 2019, a team from the John A. Moran Eye Centre's Global Outreach Division, travelled to Trinidad and visited San Fernando General Hospital (SFGH) on an outreach cataract surgery mission.

Since 2016, Trinidad Eye Hospital has had the privilege of being a "Partner in Service" with the University of Utah's Moran Eye Centre from Utah, USA. TEH considers the Moran organization a true mentor. Both organizations have a desire to share knowledge regarding the prevention of avoidable blindness and



increase the impact and effectiveness of free eyecare programmes around the world.

This mission of the outreach team to San Fernando General Hospital, was a mission where TEH believed it was important to lend support at every juncture to ensure that the objectives of the team were achieved. It was a relationship building opportunity that worked well and left everyone feeling fulfilled at the end of the mission.

Dr. Bhola had the opportunity to operate alongside the team helping to complete 154 free cataract surgeries after just one week.



Trinidad Eye Hospital has benefited tremendously from being involved in this cataract project and it was an honour to be involved. Having the opportunity to work alongside such highly skilled surgeons and professionals who are passionate about solving eyecare problems was indeed something special.

Working together with SFGH on this project also showed promise for the future of eyecare in our country and we are hopeful that such opportunities can be increased. We will continue to advocate and commit to the building of stronger relationships to increase the magnitude of our collective impact so that many more patients can receive that eyecare that they need.





## Hello Antigua!

### Antigua's Ministry Of Health Signs Agreement With Trinidad Eye Hospital On World Sight Day 2019



▲ From left, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Joan Carrot; Chairman of Mount St John Hospital Board, Sean Cenac; Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Rhonda Sealy Thomas; Minister of Health, Molwyn Joseph; Chairman and Chief Surgeon of TEH, Dr. Ronnie Bhola; and Chairman of the Medical Benefits Scheme, Osbert Frederick.

October 10th 2019 was World Sight Day around the globe and this occasion was marked by a momentous visit to Antigua and Barbuda by Dr. Bhola and a team from Trinidad Eye Hospital. The reason for this visit was special since it marked the improvement of Ophthalmology services for the citizens of Antigua and Barbuda who would access eye surgeries offered by Trinidad Eye Hospital at the Mount St. John Medical Centre (MSJMC).

The Honourable Minister of Health Mr. Molwyn Joseph and the Chief Medical Officer Dr. Rhonda Sealy Thomas were both



▲ MSJMC's Dr. Maritza Quintero observes TEH's Dr. Ronnie Bhola perform surgery.



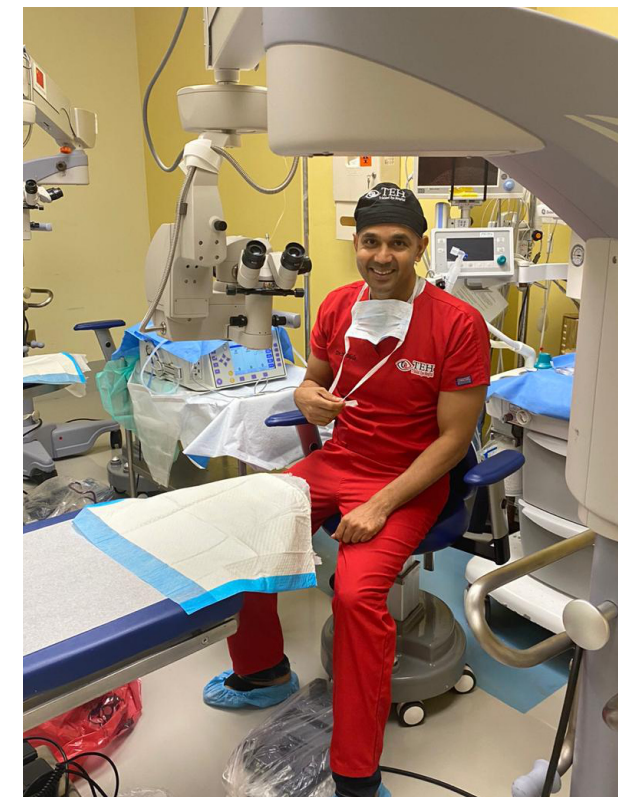
◀ Trinidad Eye Hospital and Antigua's Ministry of Health teams.

▼ Dr. Ronnie Bhola in the surgical theatre at MSJMC.

instrumental in formalizing a 2-year contract for specialist Cataract and Retina surgeries to be performed in their home country.

For several years, patients had to be flown to Trinidad from Antigua for lengthy stays to have their eye surgeries done. This cost was becoming burdensome for the Government of Antigua. Based on the long-standing relationship with patients from Antigua, Dr. Bhola, Chairman and Chief Surgeon at TEH, offered to visit the island with his team to perform surgeries on a monthly basis at subsidized price.

Dr. Bhola said "Our partnership will benefit people. People who come to Trinidad (for eye surgery) have to spend two weeks and that's very costly for families- accommodation, transportation- things we take for granted" He continued "This will change all of that. Instead of a hundred people having to come to Trinidad, one guy will go to Antigua and



▶ TEH and MSJMC Surgical Teams.







▲ MSJMC's Dr. Maritza Quintero and TEH's Dr. Ronnie Bhola during an education session.

**“OUR PARTNERSHIP WILL BENEFIT PEOPLE. INSTEAD OF A HUNDRED PEOPLE HAVING TO COME TO TRINIDAD, ONE GUY WILL GO TO ANTIGUA AND THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING!”**

TEH team in the clinics and operating theatre. This allows for the improvement of the overall standard of eyecare that is delivered.

Since these visits started in October 2019, the team has done 43 eye surgeries successfully. Unfortunately visits to Antigua have been on hold due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, however, we are looking forward to resuming visits as soon as it is safe to travel again.

that changes everything. We just fly there and that means everybody gets to stay with their families and get care.”

The agreement also includes an education component. Educational sessions are included for non-ophthalmic healthcare professionals at the hospital during every visit and also the local team working with the



▲ TEH Surgical Team

▼ Participants listen to a presentation by TEH's Dr. Ronnie Bhola during an education session.



# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Volunteer for our Outreach Events & Charity Initiatives



**Interested in helping others?**

Volunteer your time and services for our Outreach Events & Charity Initiatives!

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## Learn. Help. Repeat.

By: Prianka Persad



Ophthalmic technology affords anyone a lifetime career of helping people see better!

Is there anything more rewarding?

Subsequent to my certification as an Ophthalmic Assistant, I recognized that I wanted to take the next step up. I continued to work diligently, achieving certification as an Ophthalmic Scribe, and Certified Ophthalmic Technician, with a sub-

specialisation in Ophthalmic Surgical Assisting.

There are several reasons I chose to climb the ladder of certification. Increasing confidence, increasing value to the Ophthalmologists, improving the quality of care I could provide to patients and of course, personal satisfaction - certifications allowed me to view this profession as a career rather than a job - "Do what you love, love what you do and you will never work a day in your life."

Next Step: COMT Certification (*Certified Ophthalmic Medical Technologist*)



With enthusiasm and passion for opportunities in eyecare, I continued in career advancement to become a member of the Association of Technical Personnel in Ophthalmology (ATPO). This platform turned passion into action and I was further accepted as one of ATPO's Regional Ambassadors, helping to spread awareness in ophthalmology and developing excellence through advocacy, trust, personal commitment and opportunity.



In 2019, I was appointed the Vice President of the Caribbean Association of Ophthalmic Technical Personnel (CAOTP). This regional board is committed to working with the International Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthalmology, providing certification and continuing medical education credits to maintaining professional certification. CAOTP remains true to the aim of certification and education for allied ophthalmic professionals within the region while forging extra-regional links.



Currently, I stand as one of approximately 30 certified professionals in the Caribbean, however, it does not stop there. I am continuing on the journey of furthering my certification both at the core and sub-speciality levels. I remain committed to advancing my education, proficiency and professional standing while advocating for ophthalmology.

**OPHTHALMIC TECHNOLOGY  
AFFORDS ANYONE A LIFETIME  
CAREER OF HELPING PEOPLE SEE  
BETTER!  
IS THERE ANYTHING MORE  
REWARDING?**



# The Next Generation of Ophthalmologists

By: B. Vineeth Kumar



Training the next generation of ophthalmologists is always an arduous task. It is a challenge to firstly understand the needs of a prospective trainee doctor, see if it can be provided within the organisation and also help in their overall development.

Having trained in the UK which has one of the best training programs in the world, I hoped a contribution could be made in Trinidad. I quickly realised that in the UK, where organising a program within a public sector hospital, the role of senior doctor is primarily only clinical and sometimes support in development as the overall framework already existed. At an organization in the private health sector, creation of a robust training program is not just a challenge but a massive Herculean task.

The TEH training program started in 2018 with its first resident. The progress made by him and the organization, has allowed the addition of another resident at the end of 2019.

Since I joined, I was asked to transform the existing training framework into a more robust structure of training as experienced in UK. This included an assessment of current training, road to accreditation of training, accreditation by organisations like Royal College of Ophthalmologists, education, feedback and governance in the working environment.

Within the last 6 months, even through this COVID-19 pandemic, we are proud of the framework and structure we have built. Our weekly teaching even attracts trainees and ophthalmologists outside our program, which is very encouraging.

Guest lectures by colleagues from UK and Trinidad adds to the charm.

Feedback from trainees about this program is even more reassuring, in particular witnessing the growth being experienced in the art of their presentations and public speaking.

Governance of the training, including development of logbooks and review of the same, helps in supporting the development of the residents. This helps build a structure to the needs and deliverables akin to the program offered by Royal College of Ophthalmologists in the UK.

Team building and leadership are also being encouraged which would help with their wholistic growth as doctors and individuals. Even during challenging times such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Our residents have been very successful thus far and have truly learnt and grown since the program started. These skills and growth have even allowed the residents, under supervision, to run their own basic post-op clinics.

We have begun the journey towards training the next generation of ophthalmologists from Trinidad for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the region and the world. We hope that with time we can spread the message about the development of well-trained eye doctors throughout the Caribbean, who are competent, not just in delivery of eye care, but also, will be caring doctors at the same time.



◀ Dr. Bhola with Residents  
Dr. Mohammed (left)  
and Dr. Badasee (right)

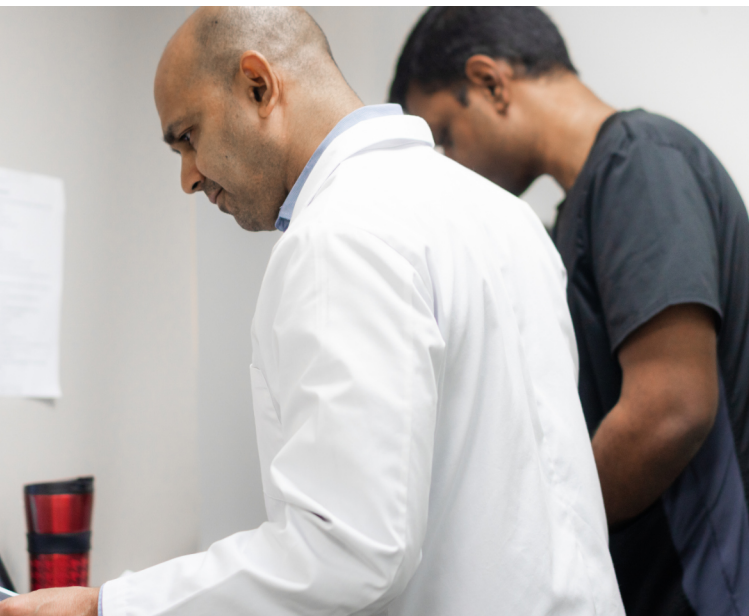


# Fueling My Passion For Ophthalmology

By: Dr. Zahrid Mohammed

Time can really fly when you're having fun. Looking back at my first day starting work with Dr Bhola at CVRS/TEH, I remember thinking that there are so many people dependent upon the services provided in order to prevent themselves from going blind, whether it be the vision saving surgeries Dr Bhola performs or from the patients he follows up in clinics. From that realization, my passion for ophthalmology intensified and so the journey began.

Soon enough, I was quickly adopted into the CVRS/TEH family. This comprised the clinical team, surgical team, optical team and those behind



the scenes making sure all patients were able to achieve the treatment they needed. This was the heart behind bringing vision to patients, and that resultant smile they protruded that made all the effort worth it. Not long after, I started clinics with Dr Dwarika, and was able to gain a greater insight into the scope of patients' conditions and more so, with the recent arrival of Dr Kumar, residents are now able to have a forum to discuss ophthalmology and facilitate peer learning on a unique level.

Between these prodigious mentors and staff, and the dynamic nature of TEH, over these past couple of years, I was able to not only broaden my understanding of ophthalmology, but developed a rapport with the patients, for which I am truly grateful.

# Aspiring Towards Excellence In Ophthalmology

By: Dr. Vikash Badasee



Throughout my journey in medical school, I have always been fascinated by the eye as an organ. This fascination was compounded during my 4th year rotations in Ophthalmology. From then on, I was determined to specialize in this field.

When I was offered a job at CVRS/TEH to work and train under Dr. Ronnie Bhola, the best in the business, it was quite surreal. I jumped at the offer. I was nervous when I started because I had limited experience in Ophthalmology from the 4 weeks spent in the rotation in medical school. Both Dr. Bhola and Dr. Dwarika were very patient with me in their training methods.

Three months into my residency program, Dr. Vineeth Kumar joined the team. This is when training really took off. Most of my clinic days were with Dr. Kumar, where he helped me lay the blocks of my foundation in Ophthalmology. Clinic days were spent seeing as many patients as possible, and demonstrating examination techniques, various pathologies and a variety of procedures. To hone the knowledge learnt during clinics, I was encouraged to teach what was taught in case presentations. I would present to the entire team, which encouraged critiquing and, in turn, built morale and confidence in public speaking.

My experience thus far has been incredible. Training encompasses so much more than academics. I am eternally grateful for the opportunity given to me.





# Continuous Training Of Clinic Aides

By: Prianka Persad

In today's competitive health care environment, the most efficient and productive ophthalmic practices have a strong competitive advantage. There is considerable evidence that well-trained staff increase productivity, patient satisfaction, and practice efficiency.

Caribbean Vitreous & Retina Surgery Ltd and Trinidad Eye Hospital have been keen on developing its clinic aides through learning and certification so that we continue to provide quality care to our patients, at every level. Our clinic aides are empathetic, reliable and motivated persons making them the right candidates for training. Clinic aide training is a project which I have willingly accepted, and our team is eager to 'get the ball rolling'.

At patient visits, our clinic aides initiate patients' examinations by gathering a comprehensive medical history, assessing and documenting visual status, and performing diagnostic testing procedures in preparation for the consultation with the doctor. Training will ensure that we maintain a high quality and level of competency while demonstrating a commitment to the profession.



Accomplishing this assignment requires a culture of teamwork, determination, personal commitment, and respect. To achieve this, our Certified Allied Ophthalmic personnel is working together with our doctors to provide training using the iCAHPO's curriculum, as well as the Aravind Eye Care System's allied ophthalmic resources, to cover everything from the anatomy of the eye, to being knowledgeable about surgical procedures.

**I BELIEVE EDUCATION IS AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE. YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU, IT WILL ALWAYS BE YOURS, AND IT WILL HELP YOU ADVANCE!**

Of course, we are facing a worldwide problem: COVID-19! The global pandemic is touching all sectors and every person! While the pandemic has prohibited the regular classroom-style sessions, it has not stopped us. Our

team now uses an online video conferencing platform to conduct weekly training sessions which will be further supplemented by practical applications. Our team will advance their knowledge and skills in the clinical setting under the guidance and supervision of seasoned technical staff physicians.

Ophthalmic medical personnel are health care professionals in a distinct field of allied health and they play a critical role in delivering quality eyecare. I am definitely looking forward to creating new and innovative educational opportunities for this mission.

Only you can guide your career. I believe education is an invaluable resource. You can take it with you, it will always be yours, and it will help you advance!





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