

Free eye surgery for 27

8 Hrs Ago

[Joan Rampersad](#)

Christmas in July



Dr Ronnie Bhola

CHRISTMAS came early for 27 people who were given the Gift of Sight at Good Health Medical Centre in Woodbrook on Monday.

Dr Ronnie Bhola, chief surgeon at the Trinidad Eye Hospital (TEH), was one of four doctors involved in the mass operations. The others were Dr Arindel Maharaj from Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, Miami, Dr Shailendra Sugrim, head of the ophthalmology department at Georgetown Public Hospital in Guyana and Dr Dorian Dwarika, consultant at TEH.

Bhola told Newsday they teamed up for the event and he also recognised three other doctors, Dr Dionisio Charran from Santo Domingo, Zarid Mohammed, a TEH doctor, and Dr Sheldon Olton, an anaesthetist with the TEH, as well as all of the Good Health medical staff who assisted with the surgery.

All 27 cataract operations were done free of charge to the patients. Bhola said: "All year round we see patient in the clinics, some of them waiting for surgery, for whatever reason, for years. Some of them have difficulty even walking into the clinic and a lot of them get depressed because they can't see."

"Cataract surgery is a quick, simple, effective surgery. Within ten to 15 minutes we can restore sight. So this day is going to give not only sight but really life back into 27 people."

Asked what inspired his team and him to do it, Bhola said: "When we see patients in the clinics, and the suffering, we know we could do something about it, and the main problem people have is really the finance. They just can't get the money to be able to have the surgery, so we decided we will partner with the suppliers, the hospital and other doctors to be able to get the finance bridge sorted out. And once we got that sorted out, we knew we can help them."

For eligibility for the charity list, Bhola said a protocol is set up for that.

"First, a patient has to see the doctor, then the doctor will do the assessment of the case to determine how bad the vision is, and if it is in both eyes. Then that doctor, based on the case, would recommend to the TEH that patient for the charity list, then a group selected by TEH to look at the charity surgeries will meet and choose the most needy cases."

He said patients are seen in clinics at four locations: Maraval, St Augustine, Freeport and San Fernando.

A beaming Bhola expressed how happy he and his team were to make the Christmas in July event possible yesterday. He said: "This is one of the greatest days of the calendar year for us. We have two now. We used to do it only at Christmas time as our Christmas charity event, now we do Christmas in July, so now we get this boost and happy feeling twice a year. We really want to do more because this gives us the happiness. Everything gives us financial gain sometimes but when we're giving back like this, this is what we live for."

Bhola and he and his peers started doing the free cataract surgeries in 2012, though this was only the fifth time at the TEH, and hundreds of patients have benefited.

Also supporting the noble gesture yesterday were the Good Health Medical Centre, Eye See You Ophthalmic and Medical Supplies Ltd, Vary Medical, Nabbies Trading Company Ltd, Caribbean Ophthalmic Services, Oscar Francois Ltd, Novartis and Engimed Ltd.

Bhola said the team wants to go a step further.

"The next thing we want to try and do is vitrectomy surgery for diabetic patients, who suffer with bleeding in the eyes and go blind from that. So later in the year we are going to have our first charity event to try and raise funds to do those surgeries because they are very expensive surgeries. We are looking for support from everybody - the media, sponsors, corporate TT et al."