New developments for eye care in Sumba

The commitment and determination of an Australian Ophthalmology and Optometry team to reduce avoidable blindness and improve eye health care for the people of Sumba has shaped exciting developments for eye care services on the island. The Sumba Eye Program, led by Ophthalmologist Dr Mark Ellis FRACS AM and optometrist Mr Peter Lewis and Mr Peter Stewart, has delivered annual outreach clinics in West Sumba in Nusa Tenggara Timur, the eastern province of Indonesia since 2008. The volunteer teams of ophthalmologists, optometrists and nurses conduct screening clinics to test vision and provide corrective spectacles, and referrals to the ophthalmologists for surgery, including small incision cataract surgery.

The Indonesian team members are experienced in small incision cataract surgery and on top of their regular workload, they undertake monthly outreach clinics in Sulawesi and West Papua, so they were well versed in the obstacles of outreach work and were able to hit the ground running with the Australian team on the first day.

The Australian team had high praise for the young Indonesian doctors’ skills and attitude. Reflecting on their involvement, Dr Ellis commended Dr Habibah: “If Dr Abrar and Dr Hasnah represent the calibre of your Trainees and young ophthalmologists, then your training program has a bright future.”

The Indonesian team are enthusiastic to continue the partnership with the Australian team on the first day. The American team had high praise for the young Indonesian doctors’ skills and attitude. Reflecting on their involvement, Dr Ellis commended Dr Habibah: “If Dr Abrar and Dr Hasnah represent the calibre of your Trainees and young ophthalmologists, then your training program has a bright future.”

“Reducing blindness in Indonesia, especially in the eastern part is our responsibility. And having friends to do it together with is really wonderful. “I am really happy that we are involved in the program, because the collaboration also widens education, knowledge sharing, skills and experiences. See Hasnah and Abrar learn from the Australian team was amazing.”

Having two operating tables meant that the surgical team was able to provide training and support for the young Indonesian doctors, while achieving a good throughput of patients over the course of the week. The benefit of the collaboration was significant.

The involvement of the Indonesian ophthalmologists is a significant step for the Program, which has been seeking opportunities to engage regional doctors and develop their training component, with the aim of eventually transferring the program to local ownership.

The program successfully recruited two Sumbanese (with the assistance of the Sumba Foundation a local NGO) and sponsored their training as eye care workers in order to set up a permanent eye care service in the main town of West Sumba. Nefry Radema and Serly Ywanganpu, who have qualifications in public and environmental health and general nursing respectively, completed a basic eye care training program at the John Fawcett Foundation in Bali earlier this year. Shortly after completing the training program, they joined the Sumba Eye Program’s optometry clinic for intensive one to one training with the Australian optometry team in June.

The Program received a grant from Optometry Giving Sight (OGS) to fund the initial training program and purchase motorcycles for the eye care Trainees to enable them to travel out to the districts to screen and inform the more remote communities about eye health care, which might otherwise not be reached.

OGS is also sponsoring the travel for the Australian optometry team members for the next three years, so they can continue to conduct their annual visits to the island to provide ongoing training, and reinforce the skills learnt.

With the majority of Sumbanese unable to afford treatment in Bali or overseas, the delivery of ophthalmic and optometry services through the Sumba Eye Program has been one of the only ways...
Red-faced or Rouge?

Be sceptical about the ingredients of the skin care you use

A fit and energetic surgeon consulted me some months ago due to persistent, red, itchy lines above and around the eyes and down the naso-oral fold. Nothing applied seemed to relieve them, nor even corticosteroids. Was it due to sweating a lot in the gym or an infection acquired from a tattoo? Was it some partial butterfly lupus type rash or were they cutaneous manifestations of an underlying connective tissue disorder? So many of my medically qualified patients self medicate in extremis and never consult until they are desperate. This surgery was no exception. But the advantage of being a GP is that we do have experience of common medical conditions. It ‘looks like MI’, I stated, eliciting a startled response – “but not the MI you’re thinking of” I had to add. For a detailed history, including generalised inflammatory conditions, and failing to find any other reddening on the rest of the skin surface, I asked about face creams, lotions and cosmetics. This evoked an admission to using ‘healthy ozone oil mist’, a face cream discovered last year, during an overseas trip. Although the lack of information on Sumba means that the establishment of a local specialist ophthalmology service is not likely in the short-term, the vision of the program is a situation where regional Indonesian institutions take ownership and promulgate the program, to encourage local ownership and sustainability. Ideally, the regional ophthalmologists would provide regular outreach services on the island, with the Australian component visiting intermittently for teaching and to consult on specific cases when required. The Sumba Eye Program is supported by Glenl erre and Kew Rotary Clubs (in Victoria, Australia), the Sumba Foundation and Sumba Foundation Australia, Optometry Giving Sight, Mondo mc and private donors with logistics support from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

Dr Abar (LH HAS trainee) with a post-op cataract patient.

OPTIONS FOR TREATMENT FOR THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION OF WEST SUMBA. NOW WITH THE LOCAL EYE CARE WORKERS ON BOARD, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO CONDUCT REGULAR CLINICS TO PROVIDE SCREENING AND BASIC TREATMENT, AS WELL AS PROVIDE FOLLOW-UP CARE TO PATIENTS AFTER THE TEAM'S DEPARTURE.

The Sumba Foundation plans to set up a permanent eye care clinic within the malaria training centre in the town centre, where the eye care workers will provide a full time service for the community. The team left behind all of the necessary optometry equipment including trial sets, eye charts, drops and a large supply of spectacles for the eye care workers to continue to conduct eye clinics on the island throughout the year.

The College's work has recently been formalised, with the Indonesian Government accrediting the College to work as a registered development agency in the country. The next decade will see the Indonesia Program continue in its much needed service delivery component, but also concentrate on expanding its training and capacity building initiatives. Although the lack of infrastructure on Sumba means that the establishment of a local specialist ophthalmology service is not likely in the short-term, the vision of the program is a situation where regional Indonesian institutions take ownership and promulgate the program, to encourage local ownership and sustainability. Ideally, the regional ophthalmologists would provide regular outreach services on the island, with the Australian component visiting intermittently for teaching and to consult on specific cases when required.

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Dr Abrair (LH HAS trainee) with a post-op cataract patient.

IN THE ANDROGONIC ERA we sometimes need to be sceptical about some of the claims made in advertising. This evoked an admission to using ‘healthy ozone oil mist’, a face cream discovered last year, during an overseas trip.