

Partnering for Transformation

Sharing the Gift of Restoring Sight in Vietnam

Childhood eye problems and blindness remains high worldwide, especially in developing countries like Vietnam. The reasons for the high prevalence of treatable vision problems in Vietnam range from the lack of trained professionals, to limited resources, to geographic spread of care. It is estimated that only 10 ophthalmologists are available for every one million Vietnamese patients (population of approximately 86 million). Many of these physicians practice in the large cities, leaving only nurses with minimal training and little resources to care for patients in the rural areas.

These challenges to early eye care are highlighted when you meet patient Nguyen (Figure 1). She is an 8 year old girl who was diagnosed with infantile/childhood glaucoma in her left eye. Unfortunately, by the time, she was referred to the urban eye hospital at age 7, her left eye was cloudy, enlarged (buphthalmos) and blind secondary to long standing elevated intraocular eye pressure causing irreversible optic nerve damage



Figure 1 – Buphthalmos Left Eye (Congenital Glaucoma)

One of our local pediatric ophthalmologist, Dr. Sandy Roberts (San Antonio Eye Center, P.A.), has joined efforts in making a difference in preventing and treating childhood eye disease in Vietnam. During the last two years, in collaboration with Glocal Ventures Inc., a non-profit organization, and partnering with the eye physicians at the Vietnam National Institute of Ophthalmology (VNIO) in Hanoi, Dr. Roberts and 2 colleagues have organized and taught two Pediatric Ophthalmology Conferences to over a 100 urban and rural Vietnamese doctors, nurses and technicians. Lecture topics included vision testing and exam techniques, amblyopia, glaucoma, retinopathy of prematurity, strabismus, nystagmus, and pediatric uveitis. The translated lectures continue to be used for local continuing education.

Dr. Roberts and colleagues employ a side by side team approach working with the Vietnamese providers performing consultations and ocular surgeries. Surgical techniques like performing childhood glaucoma surgery, which could have helped save patient Nguyen's vision are shared and recorded. The team has also travelled to Chuong My Hospital, about an hour from Hanoi the last two years and performed vision screening to over 600 primary age children and provided glasses for all those who needed them.

Dr. Roberts has lead numerous and participated in fifteen humanitarian missions to Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador and Vietnam. It's been a privilege to work with our Vietnam colleagues as we share/teach each other improved eye care. It's about learning "How to Fish", instead of coming to their country and fishing for them. Through partnership, we can make a difference restoring the gift of sight in Vietnam and worldwide.

