India observes World Sight Day with gusto

Observed annually on the second Thursday of October, World Sight Day is a global event to increase awareness about eye health and draw attention to blindness and vision impairment. Programmes are conducted on and around the day, which fell on 12 October this year. The action plan for 2017 was ‘Make Vision Count’.

WSD is coordinated by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO). More than 70 WHO Member States, including India, now observe and promote WSD (with WHO support) through the provision of critical evidence, strategic communications and infographics.

WSD is the most important advocacy and communications event on the eye health calendar – an appropriate occasion to engage with the world at large and with those who are particularly vulnerable: those without easy access to eye care.
access to eye care, the economically deprived, schoolchildren, the elderly, and those with diabetes.

According to IAPB figures, four out of five or 80% of the world’s blind are avoidable. On WSD 2017, IAPB launched its Vision Atlas website, a compilation of the very latest data and evidence related to avoidable blindness and vision impairment along with the main causes. The Atlas updates prevalence maps with data for every country from 1990 to 2015, with projections to 2020.


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Institutes, colleges and associations in India observe WSD with great enthusiasm. The Optometry Council of India (OCI) went all out to celebrate WSD with eye care awareness walks in five cities on different days, as well as radio talk shows on myopia and awareness on the need for eye care aired on 12 October in cities all over the country. Estimated figures indicate that over one lakh people were reached – this number is based on FM radio listenership and the turnout of the public. In addition, local associations conducted eye screening camps, discussion forums and awareness activities in general hospitals.

All of this was managed on a large scale thanks to the support of Alcon India, Cooper Vision India and Pune-based optometrist Amod Gogate.

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for the walkathons in Pune, Ahmedabad and Kolkata; and Essilor India who supported the walkathons in Bangalore and Chennai, and the Radio City FM talk show.

OCI’s pamphlets about optometry as a profession were distributed during the events; awareness banners were held high and the participants were given T-shirts in bright green for Pune, Ahmedabad and Kolkata, and blue for Chennai and Bangalore. The Council also arranged for refreshments to be served to the participants. About 2,500 optometrists took part in the events in the five cities.

Eye care professionals, students and educators from eminent optometry institutes in Pune – Bharati Vidyapeeth School of Optometry, DY Patil Institute of Optometry and Visual Sciences, HV Desai College of Optometry and MES College of Optometry – set out on the morning walkathon flagged off by Amod Gogate on Gandhi Jayanti, 2 October at the Balgandharv Rangmandir to make their way towards Fergusson College.

The early morning walk in Bangalore was on 12 October, the actual World Sight Day this year. Supported by the Karnataka Optometry Association, it was flagged off from Freedom Park by Mr Shivkumar and Mr Ramachandran, CEO and COO, respectively, of Essilor. Optometrists, students, educators and staff of Sankara, Nethradama and Naseema colleges of optometry and the Vasan Institute were the enthusiastic participants.

Joining hands with OCI for the Ahmedabad event on 13 October was the Nagar School of Optometry under the aegis of the Nagar Eye Research Foundation. Fraternity members, educators and optometry students from
other colleges in different parts of Gujarat gathered in the city for the event: Harijyot College, Navsari; Bharatimaiya College, Surat; and the Department of Optometry, CIPS Changa. City mayor Gautam Shah addressed the 400 participants before flagging off the walk along with Mr Jayanti Bhai Patel of Nagar Chasmaghar. A poster competition drew 40 entries of which five won awards. Later in the day optometrists and optometry faculty members visited the wards of some hospitals and medical colleges.

In Chennai the renowned occupational optometrist Dr PP Santanam, the first and former principal of the Elite School of Optometry addressed a gathering of about 1,000 people and flagged off the 15 October walk, organised by the Optometric Association of Tamil Nanbargal (OATN) with the support of OCI. The event was also supported by the Indian Optometric Federation (IOF) and the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO). The walk was covered by several prominent newspapers including The Hindu, the Times of India, Daily Thanthi and Dinamani. Other activities were eye screening camps for school children, and geriatric eye screening and counselling for seniors at old age homes in various cities of Tamil Nadu, conducted throughout October.

About 400 optometrists, educators and students of West Bengal
WSD is the most important advocacy and communications event on the eye health calendar

gathered for a walkathon in Kolkata on 22 October, flagged off by Councillor Baiswanor Chatterjee at Goal Park to head for Triangular Park. Representatives of prominent media houses and the film industry were also extended their support. Senior optometrists, faculty members and representatives from the industry shared their views regarding the growth and development of optometry at an open discussion session that followed.

The Optometry Students’ Association of Dr RP Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS, Delhi, celebrated WSD on 14 October. Following the inauguration by the chief guest Professor Pradeep Sharma, acting chief of the institute, and guest of honour Prof Praveen Vashist, head of Community Ophthalmology, AIIMS, schoolchildren from the Institution for the Blind, located in the capital’s Lajpat Nagar, were invited to sing on stage. As their beautiful voices filled the air, the audience was visibly moved.

The second programme of the day was an Eye Donation Awareness Walk with the participants chanting slogans to attract the attention of patients, attendants, students, staff and members of the public, many of whom joined the rally. Eye donation forms were distributed to all and many pledged to donate their eyes for differently-abled children. The optometry students also staged street plays in and around their campus. These plays drew attention to the myths and misconceptions about eye donation, and also aimed at increasing awareness about avoidable blindness.

The Rajgandhi Eye Care Institute in Mumbai organised eye health education and eye screening programmes for police personnel in the western suburbs of its hometown on 4 October. The programme aimed to identify the priorities that could lead to improving control of avoidable visual impairment and blindness in the police department.

Optometrist and MD of the Institute Ms Yogita Rajgandhi. initiated the ‘Our Mission: 6/6 Vision’ project with presentations on eye health that covered the importance of regular eye check-ups and eye care, blinding disorders, the effects of systematic illness on eye health, eye donation, and the status of visual impairment in the world.

Organised in association with SNDT University and the Giants Group of Jogeshwari, the screening programme covered visual acuity, refraction, colour vision, Amsler grid, ocular motility, and anterior segment evaluation. It was well attended, with 47 personnel screened of which some were advised to visit a tertiary eye care centre.

The Rajgandhi Eye Care Institute also organised a Walkathon on 15 October that saw the participation of students of the Optometry Department of ITM deemed university, SNDT University and personnel of Giants International. The group of enthusiastic participants set out early morning on a 1.5 km walk from Hotel Novotel to Hotel Palm Grove. En route, their loud cheers and slogans to promote eye health and eye care, and to enrol for eye donation attracted attention and some members of the public were happy to join the walk. The event concluded with all standing at attention as they sang the National Anthem. All the participants received certificates of appreciation, came together for the group photo and mingled while they enjoyed the snacks that were served.

Vision Rx Lab’s Nova Eyewear, a leading global brand, in association with GKB Optical, conducted free eye check-ups in 24 cities across the country between 12 and 15 October. Additionally, a similar one-day activity was held in Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai in association with other leading optical retail chains, to spread awareness about the importance of visual health, the need for regular check-ups, and to help detect uncorrected vision and vision problems, once again in the true spirit of what WSD stands for.