



Combat Blindness
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Combat Blindness

INTERNATIONAL



COMBAT BLINDNESS INTERNATIONAL: THEN AND NOW

Back in 1984, I had a life changing experience during one of my visits to India. Traveling to perform a complex retinal surgery, I witnessed a waiting room filled with over 50 patients awaiting cataract surgeries. Upon leaving my operating theater (3 hours later) I realized that in the time it had taken me to perform one surgery, which only returned partial sight to my patient, all those patients in the waiting room had their sight entirely restored through simple cataract surgeries. I thought, "This is how we can truly help alleviate blindness in the world".

With my head spinning, I flew back to the United States determined to do something. Sharing my vision with friends, colleagues, and any other like-minded souls who would listen, Combat Blindness [International] was born and we began organizing our efforts to end avoidable blindness around the world.

Over the last 32 years we have evolved, but that core idea of helping society by giving sight is still here, and as strong as ever. I have been honored to be surrounded by so many like-minded, kind-hearted people. I count you all as a part of our family in this communal goal.

In 2016, CBI is excited to continue expanding the fight against avoidable blindness. We are accomplishing this by increasing access to equitable eye care in developing countries by working with Peek Vision on innovative ways to screen patients, building eye centers with the capacity to provide thousands of cataract surgeries, screening thousands of children, and by training young women to become desperately needed eye care personnel. **With your help, we can strengthen this fight and provide sight to thousands more.** I would like to invite you to join us.

Thank you all for your many years of support.

Warmest regards,

Suresh
Suresh Chandra, MD
Founder and Chairman

SAVE THE DATE!

CBI's **World Sight Day Gala** is
October 13, 2016
from 5:30 - 9:00pm.

This year we will focus on the impact of empowering women through sight. Blindness disproportionately affects women, who make up about 2/3 of the world's blind population.

Register to attend at
www.combatblindness.org/worldsightday

Follow the global efforts for World Sight Day on social media with **#strongertogether**.



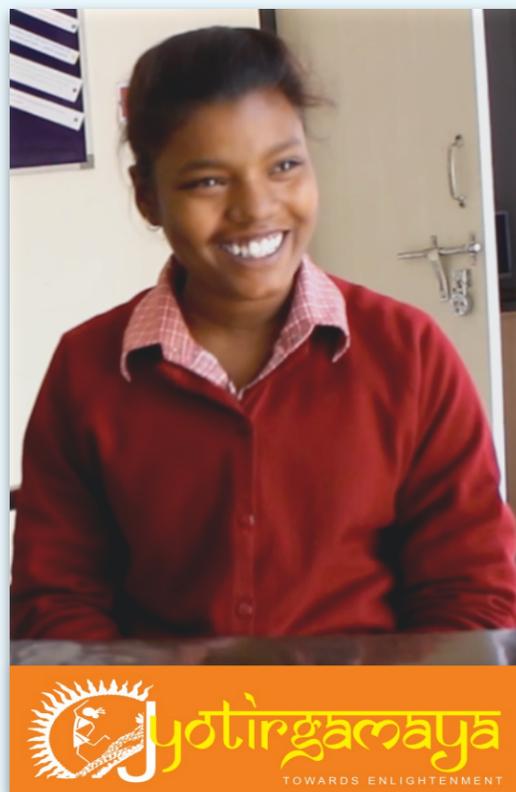
Right: Dr. Suresh Chandra, Founder and Chairman of CBI
Left: Melissa Kuecker Witte, Executive Director of CBI

EMPOWERING AND EDUCATING YOUNG WOMEN IN INDIA

Jyotirgamaya... It means "towards enlightenment" and is the name given to the Certified Ophthalmic Personnel (COP) program at Dr. Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital (SCEH) in Delhi, India. This program addresses both the shortage of eye care personnel in India and the disparity in blindness amongst women. Two out of three cases of blindness are women. This can sometimes be attributed to husbands and fathers not allowing their wives and daughters to be examined by men. The COP program invites young women from rural villages to receive the technical education needed to fulfill numerous roles in eye care while also teaching them empowerment and life skills. By meeting those needs the COP program is a solution to both the lack of staff capacity in eye care and gender inequality.

CBI is excited and proud to be a partner in such an impactful program. In February, CBI board member Dr. Mike Altaweel travelled to Delhi and had the opportunity interview one of these students and share her story.

Uma is a first year COP student from a village near Mathura, India. Her father is tailor with an income of roughly \$60 per month, and her mother is a homemaker. Uma has two brothers and one sister.



Dr. Altaweel: Would you recommend the COPs program to your sister?

Uma: If she feels like it, I would definitely recommend it.

Dr. Altaweel: Do you feel that this program has given you more opportunities in life?

Uma: Yes

Dr. Altaweel: Is it common for girls from your village to go out and work, or to stay at home?

Uma: I am the first girl to decide to leave my village and come study in Delhi.

Dr. Altaweel: Were you worried?

Uma: Yes, my family came first, but once they saw the place [the COPs program at SCEH] they were comfortable with it.

Dr. Altaweel: Has it [the program] changed your dreams of what you want to do?

Uma: I was pursuing political science because I wanted to become a district minister, but now I am doing this.

Dr. Altaweel: So now it'll be Minister of Health?

Uma: *laughing through her response* I am still studying political science. I like both and am happy I joined the school. I was not happy back home. Now I am excited to be back at COPs. When I go back, the other villagers are very interested to send their daughters [to the COP program] because they are happy to see my progress.

Dr. Altaweel: Do you feel that, in addition to caring for people and eyes, that you have learned other skills?

Uma: Besides eye care I also learned about communications and how to make decisions in life, how to think about the advantages and disadvantages when it comes to decisions.

I also learned about group work and team work, how to be together and be happy with each other.

Dr. Altaweel: As a group, do the girls think that this gives more ability for women to do the things that were reserved for men?

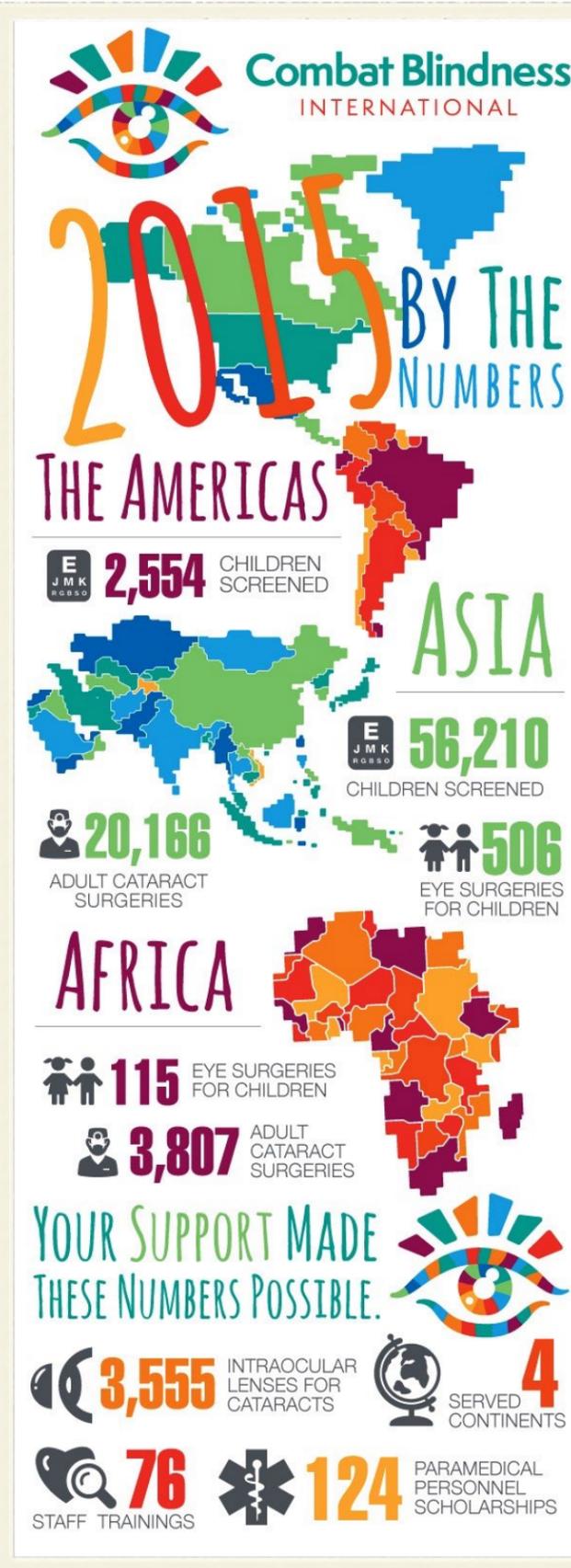
Uma: I feel that whatever boys can do, girls can do.

Dr. Altaweel: Definitely.

Dr. Altaweel: What do you think of working at SCEH and going to the outreach areas?

Uma: I just like being a COP.

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Mike Altaweel, MD is a Professor of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has been on the CBI Board of Directors since 2002.



PROGRESS IN ODISHA

In an exciting development to our efforts in Odisha, India, we are moving forward with the building of what will be the first, of many, eye centers in the district of Keonjhar, Odisha (pictured above). We have begun drafting plans with the architects and will break ground this summer. The prevalence of blindness in Odisha is nearly five times the national average in India. These eye centers will provide desperately needed eye care to hundreds of thousands of people in these areas.



Combat Blindness International would like to take this opportunity to thank our friends at the **Jack DeLoss Taylor Charitable Fund** and the **Jaya G. Iyer Endowment Fund, a Field of Interest Fund at the Madison Community Foundation** for their generous support in making this a possibility.

Spirit of India

Experience the magic of Hindustani and Carnatic music with Ustad Shahid Parvez Khan & Maestro Lagudi Krishnan on June 11 at 4:00pm at the Waunakee High School Performing Arts Center.

A portion of all ticket sales will benefit CBI!

For more information contact suresh.vanitha@gmail.com

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