

Community Eye Health, a Complement of Training in Ophthalmology

In Colombia, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, was able to bring together efforts of International Organizations, the Academy and the Colombian Society of Ophthalmology to develop public health programs with the objective of eliminating Trachoma blindness in areas of dispersed population of the Amazon and Orinoquia regions. These efforts have been aligned with VISION 2020: The Right to Sight, a global initiative that was launched in 1999 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB).¹

Ophthalmologists and residents of ophthalmology have supported these programs since 2013, offering clinical and surgical care to indigenous population of trachoma's identified focus in Colombia, involving the departments of Vaupes, Guainia, Vichada, Guaviare and Amazonas. Care in these territories requires a different approach to that generally obtained from training in ophthalmology, that seeks to develop clinical criteria and surgical skills focused on individual patients. The population approach requires the development of different skills.

One of the priorities of public health, is prevention of visual loss.² It is estimated that 285 million people worldwide suffer from some form

of visual impairment.³ In Latin America it has been shown that the highest prevalence of blindness and visual impairment is concentrated in the poorest areas, in relation to inequities in the distribution of eye care services and the distribution and availability of ophthalmologists, among other factors.³

The purpose of community eye health training is to reduce eye disease, visual loss and disability in communities through the use of therapeutic and preventive measures, integrated with the provision of services at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It is focused on understanding and identifying the magnitude of visual impairment and how health programs are designed for problem solving. The epidemiological research that public eye health offers, contributes to the prevention of blindness by identifying the magnitude of the problem, the description of the causes and the distribution of eye disease or diseases that result in disability.²

Thus, the training of human resources is an aspect of great importance,⁴ although it is only part of the aspects to be taken into account. Motivation for work in rural areas and the need to create demand for health services are also important.⁴ Monitoring the magnitude of visual impairment is essential for the development of policies focused on prevention and elimination of the causes of avoidable blindness.⁵

The experience that the work with the National Program for Prevention of Trachoma

Blindness has provided, evidences the need to complement clinical training with aspects related to community eye health, the need to train professionals with the knowledge and tools to help to reduce blindness and visual impairment by developing community-oriented strategies aligned with Vision 2020 objectives, facilitating personal development and promoting the development of local, national and international networks.

References

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