Patients and Punjab

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A team from the UK consisting of 4 optometrists, an ophthalmologist, a radiologist and 3 dispensing assistants have returned from a "Right to Sight" project which consisted of knowledge transfer lectures/workshops and primary care clinics where patients were either treated, listed for surgery or dispensed spectacles. The project was initially conceived by Dr Scott Mackie on a trip to Punjab in 2012 where he visited a charitable hospital and noticed a need for better education and the provision of eyecare for the vulnerable patient group of the poorest in this society. Working alongside a humanitarian Ophthalmologist Dr Jasdeep Sandhu from San Sanwan Charitable Hospital, the team put together a programme of teaching for nursing students, optometry students and ophthalmologists.

Concept. The World Council Of Optometry (WCO) supports the initiative of knowledge transfer and self-funding of eye clinics through stakeholder engagement. However we believe that the provision of second-hand spectacles in excellent condition still has a role to play in preventable vision loss throughout the world where self-funding schemes are not presently available or in the foreseeable future. As such we needed a programme in the UK where we could obtain this supply and Dr Scott Mackie set up "Specsort" where prisoners from HMP Barlinnie received training and conducted focimetry on over 10,000 pairs of spectacles donated from patients attending UK optometrists. These were then grouped into Best Single Vision and sorted using criteria to discard those with significant astigmatic or anisometropic components. Next an e-mail went out to friends and colleagues asking for volunteers to self-fund their travel to India so as to take part in the "Right to Sight" project. The response was fantastic and a team of 8 volunteers set off with a collection of memories which this write-up will outline.

Patients. Clinics ran over 3 days and over 680 patients were seen. The dispensing team consisted of Dr Sarah Gurney Consultant Radiologist who is married to Dr Teifi James, Mr Rory Mackie, Mr Hugh Barrett, Miss Alice O'Brien and sons of Dr Jasdeep Sandhu Abhideep and Aditdeep. These volunteers were joined by an energetic bunch of interpretors made up of Hospital Staff and local volunteers. Many patients had travelled long distances or waited several days to be registered and seen and it was rewarding; all patients were able to be dispensed form the 3,500 stock spectacles taken from the UK or "special prescriptions" made up through funding form Alcon India for those with significant astigmatism, anisometropia. Notable optometry/ophthalmology trends emerged: There was a distinct lack of myopia as the majority of patients were working as manual labourers; presbyopia started on average around 35 years of age with some patients requiring a +1.00 Add as young as 30 years; there was minimal macular degeneration but cataract was prevalent in patients on average 20 years sooner than that found in the UK with a patient as early as 40 years having significant opacity requiring removal and IOL; frequent anterior eye discomfort from allergic conjunctivitis and dry eye; a significant increase in injury from trauma resulting in minor to major loss of visual function. Of note were the cases of unusual pathology which included: congenital bilateral anophthalmia; retinopathy of prematurity; hydrops secondary to keratoconus; bilateral bulthalmos from congenital glaucoma; bilateral corneal melt from small pox ulcers; optical atrophy and tonic pupil from a RTA; total disc cupping in an entire family; recurrent sebaceous gland carcinoma and sublaxed lens and retinal detachment from congenital anaridia and bilateral dellen causing corneal thinning and constant blinking through irritation.

Knowledge Transfer. Optometrists Mrs Linda O'Brien, BSc (Hons), MCOptom Independent Practice graduating from the Aston University Birmingham and Mrs Anne Barrett provided continuing education and training on the second day of the eye camp to 60 undrgraduate nursing and optometry students from Jalandhar. This included retinoscopy workshops using "practice eyes" kindly supplied by Prof Gunter Loffler, Glasgow Caledonian Univeristy and didactic lectures including basics of refraction, and ocular pathology including Glaucoma. It was noted that the group members were vibrant with a genuine thirst for knowledge and impecable in their appearance and behavior. On the last day of the eye camp in the evening Dr Jasdeep Sandu and Dr Jaswan Sandhu had organized a Continuing Medical Education (CME) meeting for ophthalmologists with 3 CME points allocated by Punjab Medical Council. This meeting was the largest to date with 45 attended including special guests and some travelling a considerable