



**SANKARA NETHRALAYA OPHTHALMIC MISSION TRUST, INC.**

**SANKARA NETHRALAYA, CHENNAI, INDIA**

**9710 Traville Gateway Drive, No. 392 Rockville, MD 20850.**

**US Tax-exempt 501 (c) (3) organization, [www.sankaranethralayausa.org](http://www.sankaranethralayausa.org)**



While cost and non availability are the key challenges in providing quality eye care and vision to the poor visually impaired living in the remote villages, we take this opportunity to share the physical and mental hurdles that our community eye care providers need to overcome in their journey of service.



### **Winning fear and ignorance with a personal touch!**

It was a busy day for the doctors and support team of Sankara Nethralaya's exclusive 'Mobile Eye Surgical Unit' (MESU) the one of its kind medico-engineering marvel, performing on the spot cataract surgery; camping at the remote Periyamuthur village in Tamil Nadu's, Krishnagiri district. A large number of needy patients with no access to basic eye care had gathered to make use of the rare opportunity to undergo the most sophisticated cataract removal surgery, totally cost free and right at their doorsteps. Men and women who had lost all hope of seeing their near and dear ones and had resigned to their fate of being totally or partially blind for the rest of their life were looking forward to a new hope.

Going on his routine rounds of the camp Arul Kumar, camp coordinator, MESU noticed that Govindammal one of the patients waiting her turn seemed deeply disturbed and nervous. The wait for the golden moment of having their lost vision revived is often one filled with a anxiety and fear as most of the men and women that Sankara Nethralaya's 'Mobile Eye Surgical Unit' serves are socially and economically backward villagers with no exposure to the world beyond their village and suffer from fear and uncertainty when it comes to diagnostic processes and surgery.

It was only after a lot of effort in the form of reassuring, confidence building and gentle persuasion by Arul Kumar at every point did a highly reluctant Govindammal consent to undergo the various tests and finally the cataract removal surgery. It was part of a day's work for the camp coordinator who deals with such patients every day and he left the camp site to look into the other tasks, with a sense of fulfillment as he had successfully persuaded a nervous and hesitant patient to undergo surgery. It came as a pleasant surprise to the entire MESU crew when a grateful Govindammal insisted that Arul Kumar should be made to stand before her when her bandage was being removed post surgery and he should be the first person whom she should see with her new, revived vision! as he was instrumental in dispelling her fears and making her undergo surgery, leading to new, bright vision!! it was a most touching scene as she opened her eyes to the man whom she believed had brought back her lost vision with great joy!!

Nothing could be more fulfilling and rewarding to Arul Kumar and the team of dedicated doctors, paramedics and support staff serving at the MESU.





### **A touching case of helping the weakest and most hopeless regain their vision and hope!**

Dispensing eye care can be a daunting challenge if the vision impaired also has other major physical handicaps that could be a hindrance to the examination/treatment process. Revival of vision after overcoming such hurdles can be doubly fulfilling too, professional fulfillment on being able to overcome the difficulties and successfully bringing back the lost vision and great emotional fulfillment, as visual impairment can be even more agonizing to a person already handicapped due to other physical challenges.

Anjugam a 30 year old, handicapped beneath the hip on account of absence of limbs and stunted hands right at birth was brought to the Jaslok Community Ophthalmology Center, Sankara Nethralaya's exclusive cost free community unit at Chennai by Gnanam, a good Samaritan member of her church, as she was complaining of failing vision. Born without legs and stunted hands and deserted by her siblings, Anjugam had to crawl on her torso to move about and sweep, mop the floor of her one room tenement, wash her clothes and managed her personal hygiene with great difficulty and was sustaining herself with the help of a Rs 1000/- (less than \$15) a month upkeep assistance from the local church. Failing vision was threatening to make her already painful existence even more painful and miserable, Anjugam had been taken to a few eye care providers but could not get relief since they expressed their inability to treat a patient who could not be made to sit or assume a convenient posture for the doctor to examine her eyes or perform surgery!.

Anjugam was carried by her attendant Mr Gnanam and a couple of volunteers and placed on a mat on the floor of the waiting room of Sankara Nethralaya's community hospital on a busy morning, along with other patients. A highly moved Sivakumar, Administrator at the center took the case as a personal challenge and after a lot of thinking and trial he and his team modified a chair as a temporary resting place where the patient could be placed safely and securely. It was a challenge to Dr Sripriya Krishnamoorthy, the senior ophthalmologist serving at the community center attending to the patient and her team of paramedical and nursing staff as they had not come across such a case in the past, the team made a special effort to overcome the challenge posed by the patient's total immobility and showered their special care on her. Cataract surgery was successfully performed after which the patient regained normal vision. A cheerful and grateful Gnanam and Anjugam expressed their gratitude to the highly committed team at Sankara Nethralaya's community care center.

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