

Indian eye care majors to combat blindness in Commonwealth

S. VIJAY KUMAR

CHENNAI: Two Indian eye care majors – the Aravind Eye Hospital, Madurai, and the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad – are among eleven expert institutions chosen from across the world to combat preventable blindness in the Commonwealth.

For the first time, a 'Commonwealth Eye Health Consortium' has been established to bring together world-class expertise and facilitate eye care professionals to pursue research into conditions like diabetic retinopathy that has left millions of people without sight. The initiative would also build capacity across the Commonwealth to tackle preventable blindness and provide quality care to those affected or at risk.

With a grant of Rs. 71 crore from 'The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust', the Consortium would be coordinated by the International Centre for Eye Health at the London School of Tropical Medicine.

Former British Prime Minister Sir John Major is the Chairman of the Trust. In a statement, the trust said that there were 285 million visually impaired people in the world of which 39 million were blind. At least 80 per cent of blindness and visual impairment was curable or treatable, it said adding that good quality eye care was a scarce resource for millions of people across the globe, including in many Commonwealth countries.

Announced in London on Commonwealth Day, March 10, 2014, the grant would facilitate the Consortium to deliver an integrated programme of fellowships, research and technology. The Consortium's highly respected eye health organisations and academic institutions would work together to deliver the programme, which would help in strengthening health systems to prevent blindness and make high quality eye care available to all.

Dr. N. Venkatesh Prajna, Chief, Department of Medical Education, Aravind Eye Care Systems and Dr. G.N. Rao, Chair, L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, are part of the 12-member steering committee of the Consortium.

Among other institutions pooled in for the purpose are the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, West African College of Surgeons and the Singapore National Eye Centre.

Aravind Eye Hospital, L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, among eleven institutions chosen from across the world for the project