

Green LVPEI

June is a very special month at LVPEI. 37 years ago, on June 1, we formally launched the organization by starting our patient services. Beginning from Banjara Hills--now known as the Kallam Anji Reddy campus--we have made great strides towards our mission of eliminating needless vision impairment and blindness. With a robust, interconnected comprehensive eye care delivery model, the LVPEI Eye Health Pyramid, we are ensuring that appropriate and affordable eye care is available in remote rural areas. On our 37th anniversary, I wrote to our staff noting their efforts, and recognized the contributions of everyone in the LVPEI family, along with friends and cheerleaders who resonated with our mission and our journey.

June 5th is World Environment Day. This year June 5th marked a unique accolade – our GMR Varalakshmi campus in Visakhapatnam successfully qualified for the Green Space Entity Rating System (GSERS) and was certified as the **Best Green Space-Excel**. The assessment was conducted by Camphloxyle Credentials Pvt Ltd, India. Further, an *Albizia lebbek* (commonly known as the *Siris* tree) growing on this campus was awarded the **Vrikshacharya Award**. The tree, a member of the *Fabaceae* family, has faced numerous challenges. Today, it stands as a testament to the resilience and beauty of nature having grown stronger over time. We are proud to have this special tree on our campus.

All of this is made possible by the passion of a dear colleague whose hands not only help restore sight for people but also create beauty – Avinash Pathengay, a gifted retina surgeon and network director for education. Avinash shared his experience in seeding and building this campus' greenery.

Let me begin by confessing that I am neither a trained gardener nor a landscapist, I am a trained ophthalmologist who is curious, a learner, an obsessive doer, and an innovator. The latter form a predominant part of my personality traits.

The story of this green journey began when the late Mr Ansari, the GMRV campus' official landscapist, could not visit the campus due to poor health. I expressed my intent to fill in the gap, and Dr G N Rao emptied his wallet and told me to go ahead. This was a huge encouragement for me.

The first baby steps went in acquiring the competence through Google and spending time with gardeners in the CMR nursery, Visakhapatnam on Sundays. Our guiding vision was, if someone enters the campus, they should find joy under the shade of trees. With that vision, we selected a set of maintenance-free, inexpensive, indigenous trees. We adopted a modified Miyawaki technique for plantation. What it meant on the ground was that trees with the widest canopy would be at the back and trees with medium and smaller height planted in the front. The fallen leaves would serve as a natural compost to enrich the topsoil. It was around the same time that the climate change discourse around the world was gathering momentum. We went back to the drawing board and altered our plan by selecting trees which would increase oxygen content, reduce the greenhouse gases, or do both.

Trees are like small babies requiring utmost care to begin with. When they start to grow, they behave like adolescents, but they listen to you and when they become adults, they learn from their own mistakes and give us micro climate change, increase oxygen, decrease greenhouse gases and increase ground water level. They are always giving back to the world more than what they take in. Humans have fallen short of this basic truth.

I would like to recognize the actual doers. Yerraiiah and his wife Narasayamma were part of the initial team. Ramu, Seethamma and Suribabu under the team lead by Mr Satyanarayana are currently nurturing this green space. Real tribute goes to each one of them.

I am happy to share that LVPEI is committed to adopt all practices that help protect our environment both by increasing green cover and reducing carbon dioxide emission. A key initiative at LVPEI is enhancing the use of renewable energy.

Merle Fernandez, head of our Kallam Anji Reddy campus, Hyderabad runs this initiative. Here are her reflections:

Our journey in green energy started in 1999, when we installed solar panels on the Bhosle Gopal Rao Patil eye centre in Mudhole. This initiative was supported by CBM. Several years later in 2017, as the demand for environment protection and climate change started becoming stronger, we decided to expand the use of solar energy wherever possible. Over the next 5 years, we enhanced our solar capacity to 732 Kw in 15 geographic locations. This initiative gained momentum after the pandemic, when we formalized the "Green LVPEI" initiative with an aim to achieve Net Zero CO2 emissions by 2040. Thanks to the efforts of our energy management consultant, Manoj Edakkatil, we tripled our solar capacity in 30 locations over three years.

*Till date, close to 61 lakh KW hours of solar power has been generated with an equivalent reduction in close to **5000** tons of CO₂ or the equivalent of planting almost 200,000 trees. We have managed to save INR 6 crores, and this has enabled us to perform cataract surgeries for 6000 more underprivileged patients at no cost to them. Our road map going forward is to ensure that at least 50% of our energy needs are met by solar energy and every centre has the maximum possible capacity of solar installed.*

There is no one solution to stop climate change, but there are many steps that individuals, communities, businesses, and governments can take to mitigate its effects. We have adopted a few of these steps, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions through the use of renewable energy and restoring green cover on our campuses. Further, through our Green LVPEI initiative we are affirming our commitment for environment protection as well as spreading the message to all our team, trainees, and millions of patients who visit us and witness our actions. We are proud that our colleagues like Merle, Avinash and many others are driving this important initiative.

-Prashant Garg