“An Institute, not just an Eye Hospital”

The fruits of a clinician-scientist ecosystem

This month has been truly special for us, as three of our colleagues have been selected for prestigious awards at the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) in May in Salt Lake City, USA. ARVO is the largest global gathering of eye researchers, and it is an honour to have our team recognized on such a significant platform.

Dr. Mudit Tyagi will be receiving the esteemed *Kreissig Award for Excellence in Retinal Surgery.* This award is given to clinicians and scientists who have made groundbreaking contributions to the understanding of retinal surgeries or developed innovative surgical techniques. Mudit’s award recognizes his pioneering work on "Fibrin Glue in Vitreoretinal Surgeries and Retinal Detachments." Traditionally, vitreoretinal surgeries rely on tamponades like silicone oil or by inserting an inert gas to hold the repaired retina in place, but these techniques come with various complications. There may be a need to repeat surgeries, there is the risk of developing glaucoma (another sight-threatening condition), corneal damage, restrictions on air travel, and delayed visual recovery. Patients who received this surgery are asked to hold their face down, a challenging post-operative position for many, for hours. Fibrin glue avoids these complications, promoting faster visual recovery and older patients who cannot maintain a prolonged head-down position will benefit from it. With this recognition, Mudit becomes the first and only Indian to receive this prestigious award.

Dr. Swathi Kaliki, a distinguished ocular oncologist on our team, has been selected to receive the 2025 *Ludwig von Sallmann Clinician-Scientist Award*. Named after a pioneering ophthalmologist, this award honours individuals who have advanced the understanding of vision science and applied their research to improve patient care. Swathi is the first Indian to receive this award and is recognized for her exceptional work bridging clinical practice and scientific discovery.

Dr. Vishal Raval has been selected for the 2025 *ARVO Foundation Early Career Clinician-Scientist Research Award*, which recognizes excellence in both clinical practice and scientific research. This prestigious award highlights Vishal’s potential for making significant future contributions to ophthalmology, particularly in his work on novel drug delivery devices for targeted anti-cancer therapies, as part of his ongoing PhD research.

These three colleagues will be joining Prof. Geeta Vemuganti, who was announced last year as the recipient of the *Mildred Weisenfeld Award for Excellence in Ophthalmology* at ARVO 2025. Geeta has recently joined us back as Distinguished Pathologist and Scientist after retiring as the Dean of the School of Medical Sciences at the University of Hyderabad—she had worked with us before heading on to the university. She will not only receive the award but also deliver the Weisenfeld Award Lecture at ARVO. She has also been recognized as an ARVO Gold Fellow for her exemplary contributions.

We are thrilled that in the same year, four of our colleagues will be receiving awards in recognition of their unique efforts to advancing eye care. I look forward to cheering them on during the award ceremony.

These awards and the recognition of my colleagues bring to mind a quote from our founder, Nag Rao, which resonates deeply with the spirit of our institution: *"We are an institute, not just an eye hospital."* **The distinction between a hospital and an institute** lies in the scope of their activities: an institute is engaged in creating, practicing, and disseminating new knowledge, while a hospital focuses primarily on delivering established practice.

At LVPEI, all our clinicians are provided with dedicated time and opportunities for research. We encourage the translation of the fruits of this research into clinical practice, and our signature 7:00 AM morning sessions are designed to disseminate this knowledge to the next generation of clinicians. Our institution also offers numerous opportunities for clinicians to engage in basic science research. At LVPEI, our basic science laboratories are in the same building as our clinical facilities, ensuring meaningful interaction between these two domains.

We believe that nurturing such an ecosystem is crucial, not only for our institute but for all tertiary-level healthcare systems. Without this approach, we will struggle to find solutions for current and emerging health challenges, or improve the overall quality of healthcare.

On the first Sunday of this month, at our annual Champalimaud Symposium (this was the 17th year), we had the privilege of listening to Prof. Gagandeep Kang deliver the Champalimaud Oration. She shared how, during her time at Christian Medical College, Vellore, she became deeply involved in finding solutions to often fatal diarrheal diseases, which ultimately led to India becoming a global leader in the development of the rotavirus vaccine. Prof. Kang's groundbreaking research has transformed the landscape of infectious disease research, making a lasting impact on global public health policies and vaccine development. Her work, especially on the rotavirus, has saved millions of lives and continues to shape healthcare practices, particularly in resource-limited settings.

In a similar vein, let me share another inspiring story from our team that highlights the critical importance of translational research and its transformative impact on clinical care. 'Peters anomaly' is a common congenital corneal condition found in very young children, characterized by corneal opacity and vision loss. Conventional treatments involve corneal transplantation, but these methods often yield unpredictable outcomes in these kids. Dr. Muralidhar Ramappa developed an innovative surgical procedure called Selective Endothelialectomy in Peters Anomaly (SEPA). This less invasive procedure precisely removes the anomalous cells and adhesions while preserving a key layer of the cornea—this approach promotes natural healing. SEPA has been carefully validated at LVPEI. A prospective clinical trial involving 101 eyes from 78 pediatric patients has had encouraging results, with the children having better visual outcomes. These results have positioned SEPA as a promising alternative to conventional corneal transplantation. Recognizing its potential, the American Ophthalmological Society (AOS) has invited Muralidhar to present his work at their 161st Annual Meeting in Naples, Florida, USA, in May.

The transformational impact of my colleagues' work fills me with immense pride. I remain committed to nurturing this enabling environment and providing our team with the necessary support so that as an institute we can continue to make a meaningful contribution to eye health transformation.

-Prashant Garg