

# Sight First – Universal eye health

10 October, 12:45 – 14:15

Mercedes-Benz Room

Dr. Qureshi, chairman of Vision 2020 CBM, London

## Speakers:

Dr. Irmela Erdmann, representative of CBM Africa

## Agenda

- Dr. M. Babar Qureshi: Universal eye health
- Ronald Menzel-Nazarov: Lions cooperation with CBM
- Dr. Irmela Erdmann: Case study from Africa
- Dr. M. Babar Qureshi: Case study from Pakistan
- Podium discussion

## Key message

### **Dr. M. Babar Qureshi**

The WHO has launched its "Universal Eye Health" action plan. This plan focuses on eye health, the prevention of cataracts, the development of human resources and the detection of impaired vision. The action plan aims at achieving these goals by providing greater resources to national healthcare systems: discussion papers, the new plan and its effect on eye health.

### **Ronald Menzel-Nazarov**

The cooperation of MD-111, the Lions in Germany and CBM is a real success story and a great example how real and sustainable success can be achieved, if the right partners come together. Its main objective is to fight blindness and eye diseases in children in poor parts of the world. The cooperation began in 1992, and since then, 3 million patients have been treated. More than 200,000 eye operations were performed and around 40 clinics in Africa, Asia and Latin America have been supported.

### **Dr. Irmela Erdmann**

West Africa is probably the region that poses the greatest challenges when it comes to health and healthcare. The region has been blighted by huge problems, such as the outbreak of the Ebola virus in three countries, violence against civilians in Nigeria by Boko Haram and political crises in Ivory Coast and Mali. And we should not forget that Sierra Leone and Liberia are still suffering from the consequences of recent civil wars. Together with CBM, the German Lions have helped people in this region by setting up eye health programmes for children in Togo and Ivory Coast. These programs focus on diagnosis, eye operations, support for visually impaired children and special training to retain vision where possible. Updates to these projects were presented.

## **Dr. Babar Qureshi**

The most challenging task when it comes to eye health is the strengthening of local health systems. This is however a worthwhile strategy as it will result in good and lasting long-term outcomes. A case study of a project where CBM and the Lions joined up with many other partners shows how successful such projects can be. Over a period of 10 years, blindness in the population was nearly halved, from 1.78% to 1%.

Ronald Menzel-Nazarov, representative of CBM, presented the latest projects of its SightFirst action plan:

Dr. Qureshi: Global developments/trends in eye health

Vision 2020 was launched in the late 1990s. We have come a long way since then and now have a Global Action Plan (GAP) and a Universal Eye Health plan, which means that everybody can access treatment without having to pay. The main differences between our approach today and Vision 2020:

1. We moved away from blindness to visual impairment, shifting the focus onto eye health
2. Rehabilitation has become an integral part of our project

Objectives 2014 – 2019: reduction of visual impairment by 25 percent

Differences between GAP and Vision 2020: Responsibility lies with governments; integrated national plans; greater emphasis on prevention programs prior to and after treatment.

## **CBM**

CBM wants to break the vicious circle of blindness and poverty. Since 1992, the German Lions have been working with CBM. In 2012, a flagship project was launched: Rays of Hope for Children in Africa. Every year, around 1.5 million Euro are spent on this project, and these funds are mainly raised by the RTL Spendenmarathon TV charity programme. The donation made by the Lions (500,000 Euro) is matched by the RTL Foundation and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, turning the initial 500,000 Euro into 1.5 million Euro.

How is the programme being implemented on the ground in Togo? All efforts are focused on eye health in children. Blindness in children is not a problem that can be isolated, as it is closely linked to general health and can contribute to the death of the child.

In Togo, there are currently 4000 blind children, and 10,000 children are visually impaired. The state does not run a dedicated programme to help these children. CBM wants to change this and is currently training a first intake of eye health specialists at the University of Lomé, namely 8 doctors and 60 nurses. CBM also offers training for general health workers, midwives and volunteers.

## **Projects in Ivory Coast**

Half the population of Ivory Coast lives below the poverty threshold, and the country's healthcare infrastructure is still rudimentary. That is where CBM steps in by training ophthalmologists. To tackle the problem, people affected by diseases must first be diagnosed and registered. This is done through trained auxiliary staff.

This project is also to be supported by monies raised through the RTL Spendenmarathon. At the moment, we have funds of 150,000 Euro for this project.

## Pakistan

When this project was first launched, around 2 percent of the population suffered from an eye disease, among them glaucoma. In 1998, the number of eye operations increased from 150 to 1000 per year. The project was extended from district to district, and more staff and equipment was made available. By 2005, a proper eye health programme had been implemented in around 80 districts. Today, the project covers all districts in the country. A good project plan and close cooperation with government departments and agencies are indispensable for success. Over a ten-year period, the number of cataract operations increased from 2200 to 4000, and the rate of blindness in the population dropped from 1.78 to 0.9 percent. We also are delighted to see that more and more women avail of the services.

### **Discussion:**

How does one find children that are affected by sight problems? Screenings at schools have been proven very useful. One should first train teachers in detecting children that might show signs of visual impairment. Following their report, a team of school inspectors could be sent out to examine these children. Many families don't know about the assistance that is out there and even hide their blind child, out of a sense of shame.

Why are there now more women than men getting treatment? The more we bring the services to the villages, the more women will have access to it.

End: 13:50