

## Doctors call for pushing eye donations in India

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**Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, Bengaluru, observes National Eye Donation Fortnight by organizing a Walkathon in which 200 people pledge to donate their eyes.**



Even if just 1% of Indian population pledged to donate its eyes, the supply of corneas would be enough to completely cure the incidence of eye blindness in the country. Though as many as 80 lakh blind people currently live in India, less than 15,000 eyeballs, or corneas, are donated in a year in the entire nation! These startling figures were shared by eye specialists of Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital on occasion of the ongoing National Eye Donation Fortnight.

Said Dr. Raghu Nagaraju Senior Consultant, Cornea & Refractive Surgery, *Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, Bengaluru*: "Eye donation is extremely popular even in a small country like Sri Lanka which harvests more cornea than it needs and sends the surplus to other nations. In India, however, it is a different story, with supply not able to meet even 10% of the demand. Many myths continue to persist against eye donation, such as that dead people whose eyes have been harvested will not be able to attain salvation. This is sad because at least 15 lakh people are currently waiting for corneal transplants in India, but only about 7,000 to 8,000 transplants take place every year. We need a big push to increase the number of eye donations in India."

Added Dr. Amod Nayak, Regional Head, Medical Services Director, *Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, Bengaluru*: "Government currently gives more importance to promoting cataract surgery than corneal transplants. Even though funds are allotted for corneal blindness in Government of India's National Programme for Control of Blindness, the utilization of funds and execution of the project are not satisfactory. Cornea harvesting from tier 2 and 3 cities in Karnataka and rural areas is very less compared to big cities like Bengaluru and Mysuru because of lack of eye bank units. To tackle the problem of blindness, all government-run district hospitals must have a corneal specialized surgeon. More ophthalmologists are needed in tier 2 and 3 cities. Additionally, infrastructure required for corneal transplantation must be created in government-run medical colleges."

The main causes of blindness include cataract, refractive error, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and corneal blindness (opacity of the cornea which leads to blurring). Corneal blindness is the 4th leading cause

of blindness globally. Corneal transplants are an effective solution to restore eyesight in such cases. Said Dr. Archana S- Senior Consultant, cataract, Cornea & Refractive Surgery *Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, Bengaluru*: "Cornea has to be collected at the right time, stored promptly and transplanted as soon as possible. The less time between harvesting the tissue and the transplant, the better the outcome. We need to increase the number of eye banks to reduce transportation duration. Even after harvesting, however, only about half of the number of donated corneas get used for transplants. The rest are used for medical research and academic purposes."

Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, Bengaluru, also organized a Walkathon to raise awareness regarding eye donation from Coles Road to Goodwill School. About 200 students from Goodwill Girls High School, Hospital staff and other members of the public participated and pledged to donate their eyes. The Walkathon was flagged off by Chief Guest Dr Sujatha, DIGP, Composite Hospital, CRPF Bengaluru along with Mr. U M Subramani, DIG, BSF.