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India in urgent need to prioritize eyecare

10 November 2020 | News

South India II Conclave: Spotlight on visually impaired in the wake of COVID-19



Experts at the South India II Conclave: Spotlight on visually impaired in the wake of COVID-19, held recently, highlighted the challenges faced by patients with eye disorders due to COVID-19 and the way ahead.

Addressing the virtual session organised by FICCI, Dr SV Chandrakumar, Project Director, State Programme Officer, Tamil Nadu State Blindness Control Society said that for patients requiring immediate eye care during COVID-19, the Tamil Nadu government started the tele-ophthalmology consultation and the soon to launch mobile ophthalmology units.

"The state was unable to perform eye surgeries till the month of September due to the pandemic, however, private hospitals and NGOs have started conducting cataract operations following the guidelines issued by the Govt of India to resume eye care services in the state," said Dr Chandrakumar.

Speaking on various government initiatives Dr Chandrakumar said, “We are building a centre of excellence and constructing operation theatres and post-operative wards for the wellbeing of patients in the state.

Dr Neena Rani, Deputy Director, National Blindness Control Programme and Visual Impairment, Government of Kerala said, "The pandemic has impacted the regular vision screening in schools and old age homes, however, the Regional Institute of Ophthalmology has been providing treatments and performing emergency surgeries as per requirements."

Dr Kim, Director-IT, AECS, Chief Medical Officer, Aravind Eye Hospital said, ”We realised that technology could be an excellent enabler in reaching people at the primary healthcare level.”

Chanakya Misra, Business Head, Novartis India Ltd, said that older adults living with retinal diseases are at a high risk of accidents. "It is important to be Atmanirbhar today, but it is equally important to be 'Netranirbhar'," he added.

Dr Pramod Bhende, Director, Department of Vitreo Retinal Services, MRF, Sankara Nethralaya said that the fear of virus has led patients to prolong medication and postpone surgery follow-ups resulting in further complications, but things are gradually easing out and patients have started to come for treatments following safety protocols.

Bhabatosh Mishra, Director and Head for Products, Claims and Underwriting, Max Bupa Health Insurance Company believed eye health is an important subject and in a country like India, healthcare, and healthcare financing work together.