



## Market

The Indian healthcare industry is a victim of the country's geography. Burdened by far flung and remote terrain, poor connectivity, lack of power and rural poverty, this critical industry has for long stagnated in a nascent stage. Forced by circumstances, the Government created hospitals that it ran itself and encouraged the setting up of dispensaries. Despite its good intention these facilities have lacked the resources for specialised care.

However, in the recent past, healthcare in India has undergone a sea change. Dispensaries have given way to polyclinics and polyclinics are giving way to an institutionalised industry. Chains of hospitals have sprung up offering critical and specialised facilities. In this potentially explosive market money has begun pouring into super-specialty sectors. During the last two years, the cardiac segment, for instance, recorded an investment of over Rs. 6000 crore (US\$ 1.5 billion). Fuelled by a dearth of specialised eye hospitals, analysts believe that the eye care market is the next investment destination (Source: Express Health Care Management).

Despite the fact that visual impairment is a severe handicap only a very few number of ophthalmic hospitals exist in India. Indeed, it is estimated that for every 900,000 Indians there is just one ophthalmologist (Source: industry data). The World Health Organisation (WHO) standards stipulate an ideal ratio that is a fraction of this.

In this space, one institute stands out: Sankara Nethralaya – a hospital so unique that it has carved an indelible niche for itself in world medicine's hall of fame.

Actually, Sankara Nethralaya – the hospital located in Chennai – is a catch-all name to describe a non-profit institutional network of medical facilities under the aegis of the Medical Research Foundation. There are five campuses in the city of Chennai and the main eye hospital is located at 18 College Road. It also has a campus in Bangalore. Sankara Nethralaya currently has over 1000 employees. 82 full-time ophthalmic consultants work in different sub-specialties.

Drawn by its fine reputation an average 1500

patients from all parts of the world come to this hospital each day for treatment of difficult and complicated conditions. More than 39,000 major surgical procedures are carried out annually.

Recognising the need for more such public institutions in India, Sankara Nethralaya Medical Research Foundation voluntarily offered technology transfers, free of cost, and promoted the growth of Shri Ganapati Netralaya, in Jalna, Maharashtra; and Sankardeva Nethralaya, in Guwahati, Assam.

## Achievements

The work Sankara Nethralaya has done in the field of eye care is unparalleled in India. This hospital, single-handedly, has brought vision to thousands of people who had lost all hope of ever seeing again. In recognition of this outstanding social service the Government of India has labelled it a National Institution.

This mission-driven hospital also has a proven record of accomplishments. It is acknowledged nationally and internationally for its expertise and excellence in ophthalmic care; it has several pioneering achievements to its credit, sound management systems, a vibrant set of human resources and a participative structure of decision-making.

In the 30 years that Sankara Nethralaya has been operational, prominent individuals and institutions have showered it with honour. The late eminent jurist, Nani A. Palkhivala, called it the best managed charitable organisation in India and willed his estate to it while the Ratan Tata Trust has called it the best among high performing knowledge establishments.

The Government of India awarded the Padma Shri in 1983 and Padma Bhushan in 1999 to Dr. S. S. Badrinath, founder and chairman emeritus of this glorious institute. The most recent honour received by the hospital is the



Economic Times Corporate Citizenship Award in October 2007.

Not surprisingly, Sankara Nethralaya was the first ophthalmic hospital in Asia to be conferred with the ISO 9001-2000 Certification.

## History

In 1976 all this was but a dream. Addressing a group of doctors, His Holiness Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, the Sankaracharya of the *Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam* spoke of the need to create a hospital with a missionary spirit. Dr. Sengamedu Srinivasa Badrinath, along with a group of philanthropists, heeded the call. The philosophy of this hospital would be to bring excellent eye care to the people of India – one that would adopt a single standard of care for all, rich or poor; one that would share the fruits of its knowledge and spread its concept of care to distant parts of this country.

On the auspicious day of *Vinayaka Chaturthi*, the sixth day of



Dr. S S Badrinath





September in the year 1978, in a solemn ceremony held at the premises of the Vijaya Hospital, with Semmangudi Srinivasa Aiyer offering a prayer, the hospital came into existence. It was named Sankara Nethralaya – the Temple of the Eye – after His Holiness who had mooted this idea.

The long journey for vision with a mission had begun.

### Product

Sankara Nethralaya Medical Research Foundation has achieved distinction in providing state-of-the-art care in vitreo retinal diseases, glaucoma, and keratoplasty. The institution has introduced several innovative ophthalmic procedures for the first time in India. It created history in 2004 by becoming the first hospital to perform a surgery called OOKP – Osteo Odonto Kerato Prosthesis. This procedure involves the use of the patient's tooth to fashion out a clear new cornea to replace a diseased or damaged one, thereby restoring vision to those who previously had no option of treatment.

Whether it was the introduction of Argon Laser for treatment of diabetic retinopathy in India in 1978, Excimer Laser for refractive corneal surgery in 1993, the first report on ocular AIDS in India in 1995, introduction of GDX nerve fibre analyser to study the nerve layers in the eye in 1998, establishment of teleophthalmology link connectivity with rural India in 2003, Sankara Nethralaya has been the front runner.

Its Thyroid Eye Clinic is the first of its kind in the country, dedicated to the treatment of this potentially blinding eye condition associated with the disease of the thyroid gland. Minimally invasive procedures like balloon dacryoplasty that obviate the need for extensive surgery in small children with blockage of the tear drainage ducts were first introduced in India at Sankara Nethralaya.

Teleophthalmology services need special mention because they perform an exceptional

function and, in a sense, capture the heart of the institution. In a country where 70% of the population lives in rural areas and 70% of all eye doctors practice in urban centres, the problem of reaching millions in desperate need of ophthalmic aid is an acute one. The teleophthalmology service short-circuits this issue. It simply goes to places where such aid is required. This unique service sets the pace and can point Indian corporations in the direction of a critical social role they can discharge by supporting such initiatives.

### Recent Developments

As a dynamic organisation, this institution must keep looking ahead. India is being increasingly seen as the hub for clinical and basic research activities. Sankara Nethralaya has a vibrant and well-established tradition of research in genetics,

microbiology, biochemistry and pathology.

It is now looking at next generation research projects like stem cell exploration and nanotechnology. The Institute believes that these studies in the realm of cutting-edge, frontier technologies are the answer to tomorrow's eye care needs. To make this possible, a state-of-the-art research institute – the Kamalnayan Bajaj Institute for Ophthalmic Research – is taking shape at the main campus in Chennai. The organisation is also setting up an eye hospital in Kolkata in a 50,000 square foot building.

### Promotion

There are two ways in which Sankara Nethralaya promotes itself. In the first, it teaches and trains eye care professionals. The institute believes this to be critical to its role in helping bring eye care to the less privileged. The ophthalmology post-graduate educational programmes at the C.U. Shah Centre are recognised by Tamil Nadu's Dr. MGR Medical University. Likewise the National Board of Examinations, New Delhi, has recognised the institution for a three-year graduate training



programme in ophthalmology.

In the second, it takes eye care to the doorsteps of the needy. Its mobile teleophthalmology programme is an offshoot of modern telemedicine. A fully equipped and manned mobile van regularly visits villages. With a satellite link facility provided by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), patients are able to receive expert advice from ophthalmologists stationed at the base hospital in Chennai.

The teleophthalmology project achieves three other objectives. It dispels disinformation and ignorance. At the same time it helps the rural unlettered increase awareness about eye diseases and their cures and, finally, it also assists in conducting CME (Continuing Medical Education) programmes for the medical and paramedical practitioners in the smaller towns of India.

### Brand Values

An unflagging spirit of selfless service characterises the founding objectives of Sankara Nethralaya. Its uniqueness lies in its ability to provide quality health care at an affordable cost. Even better, it provides the same care to the indigent, totally free.

During 2007, about 34% of all eye surgeries conducted at the Nethralaya were provided free of cost to the poor.

Sankara Nethralaya has no shareholders. Its profit and dividend is the team of medical personnel who work in it and share the Institute's passion for selfless service and devote time conducting independent research, teaching and training young professionals.

In the midst of widespread cynicism about Indian institutions, it is difficult, indeed, to define parameters by which to identify a role model. But the Nethralaya is a defining yardstick itself. Its iconic status stems from a perfect matching of vision and performance, and a record of achievement – enterprise and initiative – screaming for emulation in a world that seems mired in the pursuit of mediocrity. It is like a wake-up call to the sleeping conscience of India: support a cause that gifts light to darkened eyes.

The Sankara Nethralaya story is ultimately one of dynamism and innovation. It has proven to be a model self-sustaining institution, which does not depend on donations alone. It is a public institution administered with the efficiency of a private organisation. Although huge amounts of work still need to be done, the Institute is proud of what it has so far accomplished.

[www.sankaranethralaya.org](http://www.sankaranethralaya.org)

### THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT

#### Sankara Nethralaya

- Sankara Nethralaya has published a staggering 406 scientific papers; this comprises more than one-third of all ophthalmic research publications from India
- The medical record of every patient who has ever visited the hospital is maintained in the Institute's archives
- The C.U. Shah eye bank collects about 1200 donated eyes and performs some 500 corneal transplants each year
- Alcon Laboratory, Allergan, Bausch & Lomb and Chennai Willingdon Hospital Corporation are some of the companies which have funded research programmes at Sankara Nethralaya