

Eye care mission to the Dominican Republic, March 2006

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Introduction

During our previous trip to the Dominican Republic (DR), we demonstrated that VAD is a public health problem in this country. This was reported in SIGHT AND LIFE Newsletter 2/2005 (pp. 35–36) with more details given in the 3/2005 issue (pp. 21–23).

In March 2006, Creighton University realized a similar mission with the same partners. In addition to the screening of children and the administration of vitamin A capsules, adults were examined for glaucoma. Glaucoma is also the commonest cause of blindness in African-American and Hispanic populations.

The primary health care workers (Cooperadores) received a half-day review and training session on the clinical signs and symptoms of vitamin A deficiency, its effects on childhood morbidity and mortality and preventative strategies. Dr. Kosoko-Lasaki emphasized the benefits of breast-feeding and encouraged the consumption of foods rich in vitamin A, such as green leafy vegetables, carrots, mangoes, papaya, etc. The Cooperadores also received lectures on the

importance of adults having their eyes screened for glaucoma. All the Cooperadores received eye exams and screening. Two new cases of glaucoma were identified amongst the group.

Other trip activities included screening children for the eye signs of vitamin A deficiency, distributing vitamin A capsules, and providing screening and ocular examination and treatment for adults, specifically for glaucoma. In addition, a lecture to the Ophthalmology Society on the importance of screening for glaucoma was delivered by Dr. Kosoko-Lasaki.

Results

Approximately 200 children, ages 3 months to 10 years, were screened and received vitamin A. A total of 178 adults received visual acuity, visual field (using the FDT Visual Field Analyzer), slit lamp, tonometry and fundus exams. Ninety-four patients had complete ophthalmologic exams. Thirty new cases and 44 existing cases of glaucoma were diagnosed, and six glaucoma surgeries were performed. Follow-up referrals were sent to Dr. Sebastian Guzman and to the ILAC clinic in Santiago.





Conclusion

The children, adults, and health care personnel in the DR benefited from the efforts of the Eye Care team and its collaborative approach with the local Santiago ophthalmologist and ILAC family practice physicians. The ILAC Cooperadores (health care workers) use the “teach-the-teacher” strategy. This grass-roots ap-

proach reaches the poor and marginalized residents in the remote, underserved areas of the Dominican Republic.

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