

[Health]

Prime Bank Eye Hospital (PBEH)

Low vision and blindness can have negative impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Impacts may range from a decrease in the quality of life and increased mortality to large-scale economic consequences. From the cultural perspective, blindness is often stigmatised, further alienating the afflicted from their communities. The social disadvantages which occur due to blindness or low vision are also significant because it leads to a loss of social standing and decision-making authority; a large proportion of blind women note a loss of authority within their families. It is needless to say that the impact of blindness and poor vision on quality of life is quite alarming for those living in poverty. It is often the impoverished people who are more likely to become blind due to lack of access to health services. Due to the lack of awareness regarding eye health, they also tend to be more susceptible to eye infections and diseases.

Considering these aspects and the dire situation of eye-health in Bangladesh, Prime Bank Foundation took the noble step of opening the Prime Bank Eye Hospital (PBEH) which started its journey from January 21, 2012 with a view to provide eye care services to all at an affordable cost. To strengthen its service, PBEH has signed a MoU with Aravind Eye Care System (AECS), a centre of excellence in eye care, as "Technical Assistance Partner" for receiving necessary guidance. Under their guidance, PBEH is equipped with the most modern ophthalmic equipment, staffed with a renowned group of clinical and non-clinical personnel and is located in the heart of the city at House # 82, Road # 8A, Satmasjid Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1209.

Among its many unique characteristics are PBEH's experienced and caring team of eye specialists and para-professionals; a one-stop approach to provide a wide range of eye care services; its latest modern ophthalmic equipments; its accessibility to all, with a provision of safety-net for those who cannot afford the treatment; the hospital is "tailored to needs" and is set up to cater to people belonging to different socio-economic strata; the pricing is at a sliding scale for sustainability and cross-subsidisation if needed; 90% of the surgeries are done on day care basis; VIP Cabins, shared cabins and separate wards for both male and female exist and there is also a medicine shop, optic shop and a cafeteria. Without doubt, PBEH provides the



A session with Muslim religious leaders

services that any renowned eye hospital may have. Prime Bank Foundation was awarded the prestigious 'Asia Responsible Entrepreneurship Awards (AREA)' 2014 for its exemplary contribution in corporate social responsibility under the category of Health Promotion. It is because of PBEH's activities and performance that the Foundation gained international recognition through this award. Enterprise Asia's 'Asia Responsible Entrepreneurship Awards (AREA)' recognises and honours Asian businesses for championing sustainable and responsible entrepreneurship; it is indeed a great achievement for a considerably new hospital like PBEH to come into the international limelight because of its commendable contribution to healthcare and responsible practices.

Seeing the highly visible impact made in the society through the outreach eye camps, which supplement the base hospital, Prime Bank Limited (PBL) has been assisting PBEH since 2013. Under the leadership of the Head of Branch of the corresponding area, this support continued in the year 2014 too. This year, PBL financed 24 outreach eye camps, the number of patients examined and selected for free surgery was significantly high compared to the year 2013. As a result, many more patients were seen and huge numbers of patients received surgery at PBEH with the financial support of PBL. To reach more people, PBEH conducted a significant number of screening programmes in schools and industries in 2014. The screening programmes help to reach out to more patients, cover different locations of the city and promote the hospital as well. Outreach camps and screening programmes have been a new strategic shift which substantiate the activities of the hospital.

Recently, PBEH purchased a 3D OCT (Optical Coherence Tomography) with the aim of expanding its services; the OCT assists in providing full confirmation of Glucoma. In order to make the hospital personnel more capable, PBEH sent two of its Consultants to Singapore to receive



A session with Hindu, Christian & Buddhist religious leaders

training on the OCT so as to provide its patients with international standard services.

This year, the Administrative Officer of PBEH was also sent to AECS, India, to receive training on “Management Training and System Development for Hospital Administrators”. This course equips hospital administrators with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage an eye hospital both in its day to day operations and to develop a hospital according to the needs of the community it serves. Such trainings help the employees of PBEH to provide better services to the patients and be more competent administrators. PBEH clearly leaves no stone unturned when it comes to providing better care, equipment or services to its patients.

A recent promotional strategy of PBEH has been to create awareness about eye care and eye diseases among different religious leaders of the society. The religious leaders were invited to PBEH to attend a presentation by the hospital’s doctors where curable diseases of the eye were highlighted. By sensitising different religious leaders and representatives of the community, Prime Bank Eye Hospital hopes to raise awareness regarding common eye diseases which are easily curable but remain undetected. Open discussions were held between the leaders and the facilitators of the programme to clear any misconceptions on common eye diseases.

Prime Bank Foundation’s activities in the area of healthcare, and ophthalmic health in particular, extend beyond providing reactionary treatment to those already suffering from eye diseases. Aiming to meet

the goals defined by the Vision 2020 initiative of the World Health Organisation, PBEH is actively involved in raising awareness of and generating demand for eye health in order to promote the prevention and control of avoidable blindness in the country. To implement its mission to promote health seeking behaviour and early detection and prevention, PBEH regularly runs outreach and screening camps across the country. This is in recognition of the fact that lack of awareness regarding eye health is one of greatest causes for widespread eye diseases, but also to address the practical issue of physical accessibility for those unable to come to the capital to benefit from PBEH’s services.

Reaching More People for Eye Services

Eye problems in Bangladesh are increasing rapidly, as a result, the country’s development rate and socio-economic wellbeing is being hindered. The statistics given below will help shed a clearer light on the present condition:

Sl.	Particulars (in Bangladesh)	Information
1	Visually impaired	15,00,000 (1.1%)
2	Visually impaired (children)	40,000
3	Children visually impaired due to cataract	12,000
4	Incidence rate (every year)	1,50,000
5	Visually impaired aged over 30 years	7,50,000 (1.53%)
6	Suffering from Cataracts	6,50,000
7	Having Refractive Error (people)	33,00,000
8	Having Refractive Error (children)	13,00,000
9	Annual Cataract Surgery Rate	1100 per 1 million

People having eye problems are not very interested in availing eye care treatment from any nearby eye care centre/hospital. The common reasons behind their hesitancy are:

- fear of surgery
- the wrong assumption that eye problems are an age related matter and is natural
- inability to bear the treatment costs
- no accompanying person
- bad transport facilities
- the closest eye service centre is very far
- fatalistic attitude (eye defects are “Allah’s will”, and that they will survive “somehow” even with acute eye problems)
- tension about obeying post-operative recommendations properly



A patient with cataract

The reason why people are reluctant to seek eye care treatment varies with geographical and cultural settings. From our experience, we believe there is a huge demand for eye care treatment in and around the country but the supply side facilities are not sufficient. Lack of awareness of available eye care treatment and lack of understanding of eye services are some of the root causes for which people are not availing eye services.



Dr. Anthony Albert, Consultant & Project Director performing surgery in the Operation Theatre (OT), PBEH

To address the above causes, Prime Bank Eye Hospital (PBEH) has taken different steps to eliminate the doubts and confusions usually seen in eye patients. Initiatives of PBEH include:

- Top class eye care services through Prime Bank Eye Hospital (base hospital)
- Outreach Eye Camps (throughout the country)
- School Screening Camps (in and around Dhaka)
- Industry Screening Camps (within 30 km radius of the base hospital)

Outreach Eye Camp of PBEH:

PBEH itself and with the financial support of Prime Bank Limited (PBL), has been providing eye care services among poor people through outreach eye camps

throughout the country. About 60,000 (sixty thousand) patients have been examined by these camps and almost 3,000 cataract patients have undergone operations at Prime Bank Eye Hospital.

This great humanitarian role makes PBEH/PBF a **“Gateway”** for eye patients to obtain necessary eye care. PBEH has gained significant popularity within the short span of time it has been functioning because of its ethical approach, humanitarian goals and unconventional facilities which are available at minimum cost.

From our brief experience as a new hospital it is clear that people having eye problems need to be motivated to seek eye care treatment. When viewed in context, many of the reasons given above start to make sense. That is why we are actively pursuing industrial and school screening campaigns throughout the country, these are elaborated below:

School Vision Screening Programme of PBEH:

Childhood blindness is a severe problem in our country. A research study has revealed that about 40,000 children are blind of which 12,000 are due to congenital cataract. The other causes of childhood blindness are vitamin-A deficiency, glaucoma, retinal disease, amblyopic, low vision etc. Besides this, about 9,925 children in every 1 million are suffering from refractive error which could easily be corrected with glasses.

Myopia is one of the most common eye problem faced by children/students. About 59% of child blindness in Bangladesh is preventable, treatable and curable. Child cataract is treatable by timely intervention. The purpose of a school vision screening programme is to identify students with possible visual impairments. Visual problems can and do affect the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development of students. The key to successful treatment is early identification and intervention which may prevent educational problems and permanent vision impairments. Even mild vision impairments may be educationally and medically significant. Therefore, vision screening programmes should be an integral part of the total school health programme.

Since PBEH has significant experience in eye care with the technical support of Aravind Eye Care System of India, it has enough opportunity to conduct eye screening of students for all schools (Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary) in Dhaka City. On the day of the school screening, a team from our hospital visits the school with eye screening kits in order to identify visual acuity problems for the students. After preliminary

screening by a trained Optometrist, those who are identified with eye defects are counseled and advised by the PBEH team to seek further treatment at our base hospital.

PBEH adopted the School Vision Screening programme since its inception and the performance of the last two years is given below:

Year	Schools Screened	Students Screened	Problem	Service received from PBEH
2012	02	141	50	04
2013	10	3,632	417	73
2014	13	3,399	279	90
Total	25	7,172	746	167

Plan of operation for School Vision Screening:

Teachers Orientation: Optometrists, nurses and Field Coordinator/Organiser visits the schools to train all teachers about common eye diseases and vision testing. Eye screening kits, including standard Snellen and illiterate eye charts are provided to teachers for vision screening.

Explanation to Students: It is important that students understand the purpose of vision screening, and their role in the activity. School health personnel should plan time to review the purpose of periodic vision screening, and demonstrate screening procedures prior to the screening for early elementary students.

Preliminary Vision Screening by Trained Teachers: Teachers will screen their classes for refractive errors and ocular diseases, and keep a record of such students.

Vision Screening by Eye Health Team: An eye health team visits the schools and conducts additional exams of pre-screened children to confirm the diagnosis while those requiring further investigation will be referred to the PBEH eye hospital.

Parent/Guardian Notification for Referral of the Identified Students: The success of the programme depends on the implementation of a systematic follow-up procedure including notification to parents/guardians in writing.

School health personnel may precede this with a telephone call, and/or through a parents' conference regarding screening results requiring a professional vision examination. The aim is to refer the student to an eye care professional and avoid making any

recommendation to a specific individual, or a specific class of practitioner (ophthalmologist or optometrist.).

Treatment and Spectacles Prescribed to the Referral Students: Glasses will be prescribed to children and provided at a subsidised rate at PBEH. Other students (except those with refractive error) will be treated by Consultants as per PBEH policy.

Reference to Other Hospitals (if needed): Low Vision, Childhood Cataract and other complicated students (if needed) will be referred to other service centres where the required services are available.

Preliminary Screening of New and Defective Students by Teachers: Following the initial training, teachers will screen new and defective students every year and normal students on alternating years. Reports will be provided to the PBEH for screening by the eye health team. It is our belief that training of the class teachers to conduct eye screenings will reduce undetected ocular defects in school children and increase the likelihood of students adhering to follow-up requests at eye hospitals. This initiative has the potential to greatly reduce needless visual disparities among Dhaka City school children.

Industry Eye Screening Programme of PBEH

WHO estimates that 153 million people worldwide and 3.3 million people in Bangladesh live with visual impairments due to uncorrected refractive errors. Refractive errors cannot be prevented, but they can be diagnosed by eye examination and treated with corrective glasses, contact lenses or refractive surgery.

The purpose of vision screening in industries is to identify employees in need of ophthalmic services. By having the employees referred to the proper practitioners helps reduce employee fatigue, increases quality control and reduces the risk of accidents. In this context, it is necessary to mention that there are many workers who are not even aware of the problem in their eye sight and continue to suffer from easily curable problems.

PBEH started the eye screening camp for industry workers from January of 2014. Three industrial screenings were held this year where 379 workers were screened. A total of 181 workers were identified with Refractive Error, spectacles were prescribed to 174, 67 spectacles were dispensed and 25 workers were advised for referral.

School Vision Screening Programme



Counseling Teachers about School Vision Screening



Counseling Teachers/Students



Preliminary Vision Testing by Teachers



Vision testing by the PBEH team



School Children who have Refractive Error (RE) are at PBEH to received further treatment



PBEH Optometrist identifying Refractive Error of a student

PBEH Industry Screening Programme



Vision testing to identify visual problems



Vision testing with a Snellen chart



Eye examination by a Doctor



Doctor speaking with a patient



Spectacles are prescribed by an Optometrist



Spectacles are being dispensed

Service Delivery

Direct treatment costs have been a major concern for service users and their families, especially for those belonging to the lower socio-economic classes. Thus, PBEH follows the model of cost plus at a very reasonable price. As a result, patient flow at the base hospital (PBEH) is increasing remarkably day by day. PBEH is well equipped with the most sophisticated ophthalmic equipment. Recently, PBEH has introduced 3D Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) service at the base hospital in order to provide high class service to patients who have Glaucoma. In order to prepare more accurate medical reports on OCT, two senior Ophthalmologists from PBEH were sent to Singapore for advanced training. PBEH sincerely pursues any avenue which will enhance the performance of its staff and the overall hospital since it aims to provide international standard services to all its patients, regardless of their financial status.

Conclusion:

Prime Bank Eye Hospital aims to raise awareness about the low use of cataract services, and adopt strategies that will promote equality in eye service delivery, access



A patient is being examined by OCT

and use. Our target people are those who do not use or have access to basic eye services. Despite the hurdles, Prime Bank Eye Hospital has performed very efficiently and is committed to continue its eye service as long as there is a demand for it. The main objective of PBEH continues to be a desire to provide international standard services to all.