

Somewhere in the world, a person goes blind every five seconds – You can help stop that trend

The Facts

Worldwide, 37 million people are blind and another 124 million people have severe visual impairment.

Most disturbing to ophthalmologists is the fact that 75% of blindness is avoidable through treatment and prevention.

Needless blindness exists primarily in developing countries. Ninety percent of those affected live in developing countries where blindness is a consequence of poverty and insufficient health care services. Blindness results in a loss of productivity that is destructive to the fragile economies of low-income nations.

The EyeCare Volunteer Registry

Many AAO members are willing to lend a hand. The Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeCare Volunteer Registry (EVR) provides eye care professionals with information on how and where to volunteer. Register at www.eyecarevolunteer.org and explore a variety of ways to help, such as joining a medical mission coordinated by a US based organization, going to a clinic or hospital in developing countries that has asked for help, or even becoming a telemedicine volunteer and providing e-consultations to patients and colleagues who are a world away.

New Ways to Volunteer

The Internet provides new ways for ophthalmologists to help those in need. For example, registered EVR volunteers can connect to Orbis' telemedicine program, Cyber-Sight. E-consultants are needed to assist physicians in developing countries where subspecialty skills may be lacking. E-consultants are needed to help diagnose and recommend treatment for their patients. E-volunteering may be a suitable choice for retired ophthalmologists who can contribute their expertise and a wealth of experience without the expense and discomforts of international travel, or for a mid-career ophthalmologist with practice and family responsibilities who may have a few hours a week to donate, but not a few weeks/year for medical missions.

There are a variety of services needed. Travel to a developing country and examine patients, perform surgery, or teach local physicians and students. Stay home, log on, and provide advice or contribute to the online training of ophthalmologists in developing countries by providing educational content.

Making a Difference

By restoring vision and preventing blindness, volunteer ophthalmologists change lives. By eliminating needless blindness and increasing global economic productivity, they change the world.

Become an international volunteer. Go to www.eyecarevolunteer.org and register.

Wendy Ovaitt, Manager of the Academy Foundation's International Assistance program, wrote the piece for SCOPE.

NOTE: It is the responsibility of the individual professional to be aware of and investigate medical regulations in the country of service, visa requirements, health issues, safety and security conditions and any malpractice insurance concerns.