

action, taken by the membership and leadership of the AAC, will encourage others to invest in protecting these mountain environments that so many people enjoy". For further information regarding the Khumbu alpine conservation and restoration project, please contact Dr. Alton Byers at abyers@mountain.org and Ang Rita Sherpa at angrita@mountain.org. For more information on The Mountain Institute, visit www.mountain.org.

DR. ALTON BYERS, *Director of Research and Education, The Mountain Institute*

UPDATE ON THE HIMALAYAN CATARACT PROJECT

The past year and a half has marked an exciting period of growth for the Himalayan Cataract Project and has furthered our mission of eliminating preventable and treatable blindness in mountainous Asia. We are making the transition from being an organization focused primarily on cataract surgery to one that is working to eliminate all types of preventable and treatable blindness. To this end, we have begun to focus our efforts on reaching the most remote and poorest people in the region, establishing self-sustaining cataract surgery facilities in the surrounding countries, and training ophthalmic sub-specialists in Nepal to become the teachers for the next generation of Himalayan ophthalmologists.

As always, education of medical personnel at all levels is playing a vital role in this development. At the paramedical level, we have established a training program for ophthalmic assistants. We are bringing intelligent young men and women from remote villages, who have completed the equivalent of our high school education, to Kathmandu for a three-year course. They return to their villages where we are establishing primary eye care centers. The ophthalmic assistants provide glasses and preventive care, treat infections and minor injuries, screen for diseases and surgical problems, and refer more serious problems to the nearest eye surgeon or arrange for a cataract team to come to their village. At the surgical level, we continue to train teams of doctors, nurses, and technicians from Bhutan, Tibet, India, and Pakistan to deliver modern cataract surgery. At the specialty level, we are supporting some of the best young ophthalmologists in Nepal to pursue fellowships in America or Australia.

Establishing a world-class eye care infrastructure remains central to our mission and is crucial in supporting the education of local providers. In 2003, we established four new primary eye care facilities in Nepal and performed over 9,000 surgeries in remote villages, including a cataract camp that was filmed by National Geographic Television in the kingdom of Mustang. In early 2004, we opened a permanent primary eye care facility in Kalimpong, West Bengal, the first of its kind in the region, and have plans to open a similar center in the Tibetan Amdo region of the Qinghai Province in China during the summer of 2004.

The core of our eye care infrastructure in the region is the Tilganga Eye Centre in Kathmandu. In 2003, we started a campaign to expand the Centre into a full tertiary care eye hospital. This expansion will allow us to accommodate the hundreds of patients who line up before dawn every morning seeking care and will also provide space to begin a full, American standard, three-year ophthalmology residency program in July 2004. The residency program will train the teachers for the next generation of ophthalmologists in mountainous Asia. For further information about the Himalayan Cataract Project, please visit our website, www.cureblindness.org.

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