



# RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF TRAINEES TO PROVIDE REFRACTIVE ERROR SERVICES: A PILOT STUDY IN RURAL SRI LANKA



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## BACKGROUND

- The International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE) and other VISION 2020 partners provided eye care in disaster-stricken areas of Sri Lanka after the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004
- 33,107 people were examined and 28,103 pairs of spectacles were provided (86%)<sup>1</sup>
- 75% of those needing spectacles had never previously had an eye examination<sup>1</sup>
- There is an enormous need for refractive error services in Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup> because of:
  - a shortage and uneven distribution of trained eye care personnel to provide refractive error services
  - poor availability and affordability of spectacles – especially in rural and remote areas
- In March 2007, ICEE signed an agreement with the Sri Lankan Minister of Healthcare and Nutrition to train and deploy mid-level eye care personnel to provide primary eye care and refraction services in under-served areas of the country
- A pilot project to establish community-based refractive error services in the districts of Kegalle and Badulla was initiated
- The pilot project was adapted from the successful model implemented by the LV Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI)<sup>3</sup>, India



## REPORT

- The "National Programme for Prevention and Control of Avoidable Blindness Sri Lanka"<sup>4</sup> recognises uncorrected refractive error as a priority, and aims to increase spectacle provision coverage to needy populations
- An estimated 198,000 children in Sri Lanka are needlessly blind as a result of uncorrected refractive error<sup>4</sup>
- Sri Lanka has a population of 21,128,773<sup>5</sup>, of which 85% live in rural areas<sup>6</sup>
- At least 423 mid-level eye care workers are required, based on the recommended ratio of 1:50,000 population<sup>7</sup>
- Only 145 ophthalmic technologists<sup>8</sup> are currently available to provide refractive error services in the public sector
- Based on the LVPEI's selection criteria for Vision Technicians in India, ICEE developed a strategy for the recruitment and selection of suitable persons to be trained as mid-level eye care providers for Sri Lanka – as outlined in Table 1

Table 1: ICEE recruitment and selection strategy for mid-level eye care personnel trainees

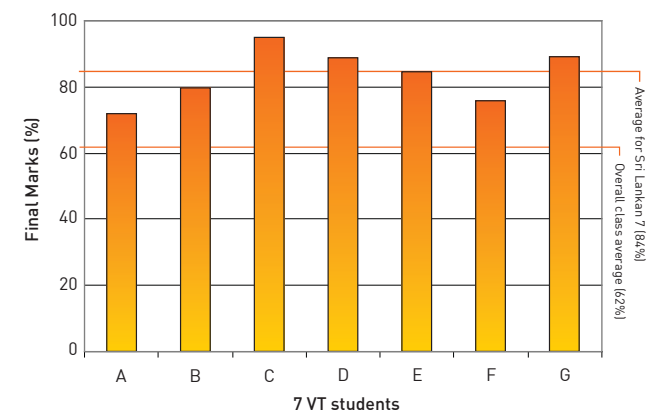
Recruitment:	
Activity:	Location:
Display notices	Bus and train stations, post offices, markets, public notice boards
Distribute flyers, talk to people	Community streets, shops & businesses, schools, places of worship
Newspaper advertisements	Local and national newspapers - in local language(s) and English
Selection:	
Process:	Details:
Interested candidates submit their résumés and contact details	By mail (local postal address) or in person
Short-list of candidates	If all minimum requirements are met
Invitation to attend an interview and take entrance exam	By phone, email or telegram
Candidates take entrance exam	30 multiple-choice questions (mixture of general knowledge questions, other questions directly relevant to the country, IQ-test questions, mathematical/scientific questions) A short English expression essay (to evaluate written English skills)
Interview conducted	Standard set of 15 to 20 questions (for consistency) – to evaluate English language skills, and to ensure candidates' motivations are aligned with ICEE's goals
Successful candidates are notified and congratulated	By letter and in person/by phone (as appropriate)
Agreement to return to their community after training	After successful completion of their training, candidates are expected to provide eye care in their communities for at least 3 years
Unsuccessful candidates are notified and thanked for their interest	By letter and in person/by phone (as appropriate)

Minimum requirements for applicants:

- Resident of local community
- High school certificate (or equivalent), preferably with Science and Mathematics
- Commitment to return to community for at least 3 years after training to provide eye care
- Good English language skills (training at the LVPEI is conducted in English)
- Willingness to study abroad for one year
- Aged between 18 and 32 years

- Interest was received from 28 potential candidates in Kegalle
- 11 potential candidates were selected for the 12-month Vision Technician (VT) course at LVPEI (5 months theory, 7 months practical training) to learn:
  - ✓ Refraction, and prescribing, dispensing and distributing spectacles
  - ✓ Recognition of potentially blinding eye disease
  - ✓ Referral of patients where appropriate
- 7 candidates accepted ICEE scholarships and commenced their training in February 2008
- All 7 candidates successfully completed the 5-month theory part of the course – their marks to date are illustrated in Figure 1
- The average mark of these 7 students was 84%, while the overall average for the class (27 students) was 62%
- 4 of the students successfully completed the 1-year Vision Technician course and are now working in ICEE Vision Centres in Sri Lanka
- 3 of the 7 students were accepted into the 4-year optometry degree program at the Bausch & Lomb School of Optometry in Hyderabad

Figure 1: Final theory marks for 7 VTs students from Sri Lanka (July 2008)



## CONCLUSION

- Eliminating refractive error vision impairment requires trained eye care personnel to provide affordable and accessible refractive error services
- ICEE's selection and recruitment strategy has proved to be successful in identifying suitable trainees for the VT course
- This strategy can be adapted for selecting suitable trainees for the provision of refractive error services in other countries

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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