



ORBIS FLYING EYE HOSPITAL MAKES INAUGURAL VISIT TO RAJASTHAN

*Inaugurated by State Health Minister Aimaduddin Khan, this Continuing Medical Education Program
Will Place Major Focus on Pediatric Ophthalmology*

New Delhi - September 20, 2009 – ORBIS International’s flagship Flying Eye Hospital arrived in Rajasthan with its global team of volunteer eye care specialists and global sponsor Alcon, Inc. (NYSE:ACL), the world’s leading eye care company. Invited by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, hosted by S.M.S Medical College & Hospital, the Sahai Eye Hospital & Research Centre, and generously sponsored by Alcon, ORBIS will conduct an intensive two-week program (Sep. 22 – Oct. 3) focusing on multiple subspecialty training and equipping the next generation of Indian eye care professionals with the continuing medical education required to address the country’s dire eye health needs.

The aim of the ORBIS Flying Eye Hospital program is to enhance the skills of the ophthalmologists in the State in treating blindness in children in the diagnosis and management of cataract, glaucoma, squint, oculoplastics and corneal disorders in children. The training will also be extended for other healthcare practitioners including nurses, anesthesiologists, biomedical engineers and technicians.

“India accounts for nearly 20 percent of all blind children worldwide,” said Dr. Hunter Cherwek, medical director, ORBIS International. “With the sponsorship of Alcon, this Flying Eye Hospital program complements ORBIS’ Childhood Blindness Initiative in India, a program that aims to develop 50 pediatric ophthalmology centers across India by 2015.”

The Flying Eye Hospital is a DC10 aircraft fitted with all the facilities to run a miniature eye hospital. It is equipped with the state-of-the-art examination & laser treatment room, operation theatre, recovery room, nursing and biomedical engineering training areas, audio/visual, studio and a 48-seat classroom. Onboard, local doctors, nurses and technicians work alongside ORBIS’ international medical team to exchange knowledge and improve skills.

A total of 13 international volunteer faculties from some of the leading eye hospitals in UK, USA, and Hong Kong will be providing training during the program. The names of faculty also include some of Indian origin like the corneal ophthalmologist and one of the anesthesiologists.

Nearly 250 participants are expected to participate in the various programs. This number includes, nearly 80 per cent from entire Rajasthan and the rest from other parts of the country, who will be gaining training in various specialties of eye care.

In addition to the training aboard the plane, which will be provided through lecture, live surgical demonstration and symposiums, the medical program will be conducted at both host facilities in order for ORBIS volunteer physicians to train in the local environment of the participating doctors.

The program in Rajasthan is at the invitation of the Medical, Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of Rajasthan, S.M.S. Medical College & Hospital, Rajasthan Ophthalmological Society, Sahai Hospital & Research Centre, and Eye Bank Society of Rajasthan. Sahai Hospital and Research Centre and S.M.S. Medical College & Hospital are the host hospitals for the program. At the Centre, the National Program for Control of Blindness Directorate General of Health and the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India will be supporting the program.

The Flying Eye Hospital program will also include a workshop on eye banking scheduled with the support of Eye Banking Society of Rajasthan and also an outreach camp in rural Udaipur for screening diabetic patients for diabetic retinopathy. ORBIS in India already has two Behavioral Change Communication pilot projects in diabetic retinopathy in two states – West Bengal and Maharashtra and is preparing a national plan to tackle this emerging eye disease.

ORBIS' focus in India is on childhood and corneal blindness. The country has the highest number of blind in the world and accounts for one fifth of the world's blind children. Nearly 3,20,000 under the age of 16 are blind but 50 per cent could have been prevented if equipped with adequate facilities, trained human resources and awareness. Childhood blindness receives low priority and is relatively overshadowed by the burden of adult blindness. But the problem is as grave as that of adult blindness. Life expectancy of a blind child is assumed to be 48 years. The loss of working years is calculated at 33 and hence the need to focus in this area. To tackle the problem, ORBIS in India is aiming to set 50 eye care centers for the children by 2015 of which 27 have already been established in 17 states. This is the 17th visit of the Flying Eye Hospital in India. Some of the earlier venues have been Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata and the last one in 2007, was in Mumbai.

In Rajasthan, ORBIS, working with 3 partners, has established pediatric units at Sahai Hospital and Research Centre, Jaipur, Alakh Nayan Mandir, Udaipur and Global Trust and Research Centre, Mt Abu. It is a State with comparatively higher prevalence of blindness in India (blindness prevalence rate of 1.55, compared to the national average of 0.8-1.0). The situation is further aggravated with ill equipped eye care facilities, below optimal performance and a sole focus on adult cataract (90% of the patient load).

About ORBIS International

ORBIS International is a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving sight worldwide. ORBIS provides the tools, training and technology necessary for local partners to assess their needs and develop workable and lasting solutions to the tragedy of unnecessary blindness. By building their long-term capabilities, ORBIS helps its partner institutions take action to reach a state where they can provide, on their own, quality eye care services that are affordable, accessible and sustainable. To learn more about ORBIS, please visit www.orbis.org.

In India, ORBIS began its work in 1988. The India country office was established in 2000 with programs concentrated on childhood blindness, cornea transplants and eye banking. ORBIS India aims to set up 50 pediatric eye care centers across India by 2015. Currently, ORBIS in India has 19 projects with 24 partners focusing in these areas plus, diabetic retinopathy, quality assurance and advocacy.

About Alcon, Inc.

Alcon, Inc. is the world's leading eye care company. Alcon, which has been dedicated to the ophthalmic industry for more than 65 years, researches, develops, manufactures and markets pharmaceuticals, surgical equipment and devices, contact lens care solutions and other vision care products that treat diseases, disorders and other conditions of the eye. Alcon operates in 75 countries and sells products in 180 markets. For more information on Alcon, Inc., visit the Company's web site at www.alcon.com.

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