

A NEW INSTITUTE FOR EYE CARE IN THE OUTLYING REGIONS OF ARMENIA

Recently the people of Armenia became the fortunate recipients of assistance from benefactor Mr. Garo Meghriqian of Los Angeles, who made a generous donation in memory of his daughter, Christine Hripsime, who had passed away in 1991 at a young age. The Garo Meghriqian Eye Institute was established in the Public Health program of the American University of Armenia (AUA) for the implementation of a blindness prevention project throughout Armenia. The purpose of this project is to reach people in the outlying regions of Armenia who cannot take advantage of available ophthalmologic services in Yerevan.

A regional survey was recently conducted to gain valuable insight about the ophthalmologic needs of Armenia. Key informant interviews were conducted with several top ophthalmologists of Armenia, in addition to 33 in-depth interviews with regional ophthalmologists from the ten regions of the Republic. Results from the survey showed that precise statistical data concerning eye diseases are not available. Cataracts were found to be the most pressing problem for all regions, except in the Zangezur region where foreign specialists had previously worked on a humanitarian mission, performing 295 cataract operations during their two visits. Most patients

can not afford surgical treatment in the outlying regions. Glaucoma was identified as another disease which receives inadequate attention. Furthermore, a rise in the number of younger glaucoma patients was evident and most patients visit clinics only in late stages of the disease for lack of financial means. The survey reported an increase in vascular eye diseases such as diabetic retinopathy in all regions and identified an increased incidence of myopia among children.

During the interviews, an ophthalmologist in Stepanavan said, "I am alone here. I have no one to consult. We need to refresh our knowledge from time to time." Coupled with the lack of learning facilities is the presence of obsolete equipment in all the regions. The ophthalmologist in Aparan pleaded for modern equipment saying "improving eye care services in regions is like building a church for the people." Deterioration of eyesight in the regions of Armenia is due to economic difficulties faced by patients, who cannot pay the minimum rates required for eye care services.

The AUA Garo Meghriqian Eye Institute aims to a) develop a central facility in

Yerevan to investigate the main causes of blindness in order to set priorities for treatment; b) make funds available to cover the costs of medical services for patients in need; c) organize continuing training programs for ophthalmologists, and d) establish a communication and transportation network to assist regional patients gain access to the best surgical treatment in Armenia.

Following the regional survey, the field coordinator of the AUA Garo Meghriqian Eye Institute, Naira Khachatryan, MD, MPH, traveled to Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health for post-doctoral training. She is focusing her attention on the public health aspects of eye care and blindness prevention and getting acquainted with the experience of countries that have successfully implemented such a program. Concurrently, an Advisory Committee is being formed with membership from the AUA, the Ministry of Health, leading local practitioners of ophthalmology, and US experts with interest in assisting Armenia.

The people of Armenia and the Public Health program of AUA are indeed grateful to Mr. Garo Meghriqian for providing the means to implement this important program in curing eye disease and preventing blindness in the outlying regions of Armenia.

Ordination of Seven Acolytes by His Eminence Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan At Sts. Vartanantz Church N.J.

The Sunday following Thanksgiving on Nov. 28, 1999, was a memorable day for the faithful of Sts. Vartanantz Church, Ridgefield, New Jersey.

lighten the minds and souls of these acolytes, that they may serve your Holy Church."

TEACHERS' RETRAINING CENTER OPENS IN VAYOTS DZOR

YEREVAN-On December 27, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II

NORA

New Eye Care Institute to Deal With Rural, Outlying Regions in Armenia

OAKLAND—Benefactor Garo Meghriyan of Los Angeles recently made a generous donation to the people of Armenia in memory of his daughter, Christine Hripsime, who passed away in 1991 at a young age. The Garo Meghriyan Eye Institute was established in the Public Health program of the American University of Armenia for the implementation of a blindness prevention project throughout Armenia. The purpose of this project is to reach people in the outer regions of Armenia who cannot take advantage of available ophthalmologic services in Yerevan.

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Results from the survey showed that precise statistical data concerning eye diseases are not available. Cataracts were found to be the most pressing problem in all regions, except in the Zangezur region where foreign specialists had previously worked on a humanitarian mission, performing 295 cataract operations during their two visits. Most patients can not afford surgical treatment in the outer regions. Glaucoma was identified as another disease which receives inadequate attention.

Furthermore, a rise in the number of younger glaucoma patients was evident and most patients visit clinics only in late stages of the disease for lack of financial means. The survey reported an increase in vascular eye diseases such as diabetic retinopathy in all regions and identified an increased incidence of myopia among children.

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Deterioration of eyesight in the regions of Armenia is due to economic difficulties faced by patients, who cannot pay the minimum rates required for eye care services.

The AUA Garo Meghriyan Eye Institute aims to accomplish the following: develop a central facility in Yerevan to investigate the main causes of blindness in order to set priorities for treatment; make funds available to cover the costs of medical services for patients in need; organize continuing training programs for ophthalmologists; and establish a communication and transportation network to give regional patients access to the best surgical treatment in Armenia.

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She is focusing her attention on the public health aspects of eye care and blindness prevention and getting acquainted with the experience of countries that have successfully implemented such a program. Concurrently, an Advisory Committee is being formed with membership from the AUA, the Ministry of Health, leading local practitioners of ophthalmology, and US experts with interest in assisting Armenia.

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