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Their vision for Antigua and Barbuda

"We called it our Guyana experience, we had such a wonderful time studying at the University of Guyana as we prepared for this new stage of our lives...."



From the Desk of the CEO

It was just over a year ago that Denise and her colleagues, Dirk Agard, Raenor Sharpe, and Ronel Richards were awarded scholarships to attend the University of Guyana to study Refraction Techniques. While acknowledging that in the beginning they did not know what was in store, today, after one year of grueling studies they are looking forward to the future.

Trained as part of Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, a global Initiative involving several International Eye Care Agencies, led by the World Health Organisation and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, these young Refractionists shared their experience with "Eye on Sight".



(l-r) Dirk Agard, Ronel Richards, Raenor Sharpe, Denise Phillip

"This is not something that we chose to do by ourselves; they actually chose it for us. The Government was doing this programme and they wanted persons from Antigua (and Barbuda) because they wanted to create a free service; I was signed up for another scholarship when this came up," said Denise.

"First, when I heard about these scholarships I googled the world "Refractionist"; I gathered my own knowledge; I read ophthalmology books like crazy because I just want to know how things work. I now know that this is an exciting career path," shared Dirk.

For the past several months, the **Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB)/Eye Care Caribbean** has been working in partnership with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda to get the Vision Centres up and running. With a population of just over 86,000 it is estimated that 863 persons in this twin-island state are functionally blind and over 2,500 have low vision.



Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer at the opening of the two-day Optometry Clinic at the Fiennes Institute in Antigua and Barbuda. Arvel Grant (CEO - CCB/Eye Care Caribbean)

Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer has acknowledged that the work of the CCB is vital to the delivery of health care services in the country.

“One of the main reasons why blindness in the Caribbean is prevalent is the shortage of trained professionals, including Optometrists and Refractionists. This programme with CCB–Eye Care Caribbean will address this issue in Antigua and Barbuda,” the Prime Minister said.

The return of the Refractionists in mid-October now means that the Vision Centres will become fully operational before the end of 2012. Arvel Grant, CCB’s Chief Executive Officer believes the future is full of promise.

“These are very bright young people; I am very impressed with their scheme of thought; they come from very different perspectives as to how they assimilate what they have been taught. I am absolutely confident that if they want to continue to become Optometrists or Ophthalmologists, I know they will do well.

What is happening now with their return is that they will be very competent in at least four of the major Health Centres in the country. They are pioneers; before them we would have trained about 44 Refractionists in other countries; I look forward to working with them to implement the start of the Vision Centres”.



Arvel Grant-CEO - CCB/Eye Care Caribbean, Edson Joseph - Permanent Secretary in Antigua’s Ministry of Health and Carolyn Gopaul - Operations Manager - CCB/Eye Care Caribbean following a tour of the Gray’s Farm Health Centre

With the final stages of preparation underway at some of the Vision Centres, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Edson Joseph, during a recent tour of the Vision Centres, lauded the work of the CCB.

“I am actually very satisfied with the partnership that we have forged with CCB/Eye Care and the Ministry of Health. It has great potential to blossom and to develop into something more significant that will benefit the people of Antigua and Barbuda, in particular, the most vulnerable. As a government, we have the responsibility to take care of those persons who are unable to meet the ever increasing cost of eye care, not only in Antigua and Barbuda, but globally. I think it is a good initiative, these Vision Centres; I would hope that this is just the beginning of things to come.

As far as the Refractionists are concerned, with all the knowledge obtained from courses such as Anatomy, Clinical Techniques and Public Health, they are rearing to go and anxious to please their fellow citizens. But they are also having moments of anxiety.

“I’m so ready to get started but what scares me is our public; we are young; that’s going to be an issue with some people so we have to look out for that but even though it’s scary we are going full speed ahead and we’re not turning back,” said Ronel Richards.

“I’m on the threshold of a dazzling career,” Dirk added. *I’m so thankful to the CCB for giving us such a great opportunity; we will make our country proud – that is our promise.”*



From the Desk of the CEO - Arwel Grant

Antigua and Barbuda on the threshold of launching four Vision Centres



Clare Hall Health Centre



Gray's Farm Health Centre



Johnson's Point Health Centre

With the strong backing of Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer and his Cabinet, Antiguan and Barbudans are now much closer to realizing their right to sight.

Having completed their training at the University of Guyana, four Refractionists have returned to Antigua and Barbuda.

Four Polyclinics are now being retrofitted to include dedicated space to be used as Vision Centres and more than US\$ 60,000 worth of specialized equipment have been ordered.

The Ministry of Health is also providing invaluable logistical support to the process by.

- Preparing and submitting the requisite Circulation Note which will form the basis of Cabinet's authorisation for the roll out of the nation wide service.
- Providing written authorisation for the designated Health Centres to be retrofitted.
- Identifying and recruiting staff to work in the Vision Centres.
- Duty free importation of instruments, equipment and material to be used in the Vision Centres.



(l-r) Minister of Health Willmoth Daniel and Arwel Grant

It is anticipated the nationwide service will begin before the end of this year.

Newly refurbished Eye Department in Mandeville, Jamaica nearing completion



We are now in the final weeks of retrofitting this facility. All indications are that the new theatre will accommodate its first surgical services during March and April 2013. More than two thousand Jamaicans will receive cataract surgery at the facility each year.

New Eye Departments for Guyana, Haiti and Jamaica

Most of the equipment and instruments ordered to support the new Eye Departments have been received and cleared from the ports in: Guyana, Haiti and Jamaica.

Dr. Rameeza McDonald completed her training in Ophthalmology at the Foundation Vision in Paraguay, and is now back in Guyana. She is working with the Georgetown Public Hospital to integrate the surgical practices at that Institution with the services to be offered at the new Eye Department at the Linden Regional Hospital, where she will be based.

Four more CCB-sponsored Medical Doctors are nearing completion of their training (in Latin American Universities) to become Ophthalmologists in: St. Lucia, Jamaica and Guyana. A further seven Medical Doctors are being awarded scholarships by CCB, at the University of Haiti. They will graduate as Ophthalmologists in 2014.

Twenty-eight new students have been admitted to read for the B.Sc in Optometry at the University of Guyana.

The students who joined the programme from Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica and St. Lucia, bring the number of Optometry students in training, at the University of Guyana to 51. The first cohort of 23 are scheduled to graduate in 2014.



Evidence-based development of Eye Services in the Caribbean getting even closer

The Ethics Committee of the University of the West Indies (Mona Campus) has approved two studies focusing on factors influencing the uptake of Cataract surgery by older Jamaicans and the prevalence of Chlamydia Trachomatis in patients seen at the University Hospital and the Kingston Public Hospital.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill Campus) has been asked to approve a series of Glaucoma KAPB Studies in Barbados, Guyana, St Lucia and Jamaica. It is assumed that preliminary results, for the Barbados-based multinational studies should begin in December of this year. A similar arrangement is being developed with the University of Mico in Jamaica and the University Hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Guyana's new Vision 2020: The Right to Sight Strategic Framework

This will be launched at the Caribbean V2020 Meeting to be held in Georgetown, Guyana on December 11. The Editorial Committee, set up to finalize the document confirmed that the Minister of Health Dr. Bheri Ramsaran will write the Foreword to the revised Vision 2020 Strategic Framework. It is expected that the document will be launched by the President of the Republic, Donald Ramotar.

Caribbean Vision2020 - "The Right to Sight" Meeting

The second meeting of representatives of Ministries of Health and Civil Society Organisations involved with Eye Health Services through member countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) will convene on Monday, December 10th in Georgetown, Guyana. Ten countries have already indicated their intention to participate this year.



Representatives - December 2011 Meeting of Caribbean Vision 2020: "The Right to Sight" Committee held in Trinidad and Tobago

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The Government of Antigua and Barbuda



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Our Mission.....

Our Purpose.....

Our Goal.....

Our purpose is preventing blindness and visual impairment while restoring sight and creating opportunities for persons whose sight cannot be restored.

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