

World Sight Day, 2011



October 13, 2011

Shortage of Eye Care professionals detrimental to the region - says CEO



Arvel Grant - CEO CCB/Eye Care Caribbean

World Sight Day provides an opportunity to reflect on actions necessary to: Prevent blindness and visual impairment; While restoring sight and creating equal opportunities to persons whose sight cannot be restored.

As I write this brief message, I have no doubt that thousand of persons are becoming blind from one or more of the 5 leading causes of preventable blindness in the Caribbean: Glaucoma, Cataract, Diabetic Retinopathy - the group of conditions which cause blindness in children, and Refractive errors.

That is why we subscribe to and support the principles and targets of Vision 2020 (The Right To Sight). This is a global initiative. The Programme is guided by a series of World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolutions, including: The Resolution of the World Health Assembly on the Prevention of Avoidable Blindness and Visual Impairment.

CCB-Eye Care Caribbean coordinated the launch of the regional initiative in July 2000, under the patronage of the then Minister of Health of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago. Since then, our Organization has been directly involved, in the development of National Prevention of Blindness Plans, and the implementation of more than thirty (30) eye health programmes across the Caribbean.

Based on internationally accepted calculations, up to 4% of the region's population is blind or severely visually impaired.

That means that there are, at least 60 thousand persons who are blind, with a further 180 thousand so severely visually impaired that they need magnifiers and other low vision appliances, to use whatever little sight they have left.

Furthermore, we estimate that one in every thousand children of school age is blind, with 3 in every thousand being so severely visually impaired that they need low vision appliances (including large print text) to take advantage of available education opportunities.

One of the main reasons why the Caribbean has such a high prevalence of avoidable blindness, is the extreme shortage of Ophthalmologists, Optometrists, Refractionists and other eye health professionals across the region. *(continued pg 2)*

Shortage of Eye Care professionals ...(contd)

In the English-speaking Caribbean, the ratio is approximately one Ophthalmologist to almost 125 thousand and one Optometrists to around one hundred thousand.

Until we can get the ratio closer to what obtains in countries like: Australia, France and the UK, we will continue to experience an epidemic of avoidable blindness and visual impairment.

That is why we commend the University of The West Indies (St. Augustine Campus) and the University of

Guyana, for introducing the Bachelor of Science in Optometry.

Furthermore, as more and more young medical Doctors come back from Cuba, we have an extra-ordinary opportunity, to rapidly expand access to training in Ophthalmology.



WORLD SIGHT DAY

World Sight Day is a global event that focuses attention on blindness and vision impairment. It is observed on the second Thursday of October each year since the World Health Organisation (WHO) in collaboration with the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), launched the "VISION 2020-The Right to Sight" Initiative in 1999.

This year's celebration will take place on the 13th of October 2011. A global theme has always been proposed to all the stakeholders involved in eye health. However, for the 2011 World Sight Day celebration, the Executive Board of Vision 2020 has decided not to provide a theme.



According to WHO statistics, 286 million people worldwide are visually impaired with 39 million of them categorized as blind.

Eighty percent of blindness and visual impairment is avoidable, which means these are health problems that can be treated or prevented through known, cost-effective measures. In fact, restoring sight and preventing blindness are among the most cost-effective interventions in health care.

On October 13, 2011, across the Caribbean and around the world vision clinics, eye care professionals and individuals will be participating in **World Sight Day 2011** activities and events to draw attention to their work in prevention and treatment of blindness and visual impairments.



Casper Fredrick closed his eyes as

he concentrated on his latest project - that of making a rug from scraps of fabric.

Although he could not see the colours, his rugged hands, hardened by years of toil, undertook the delicate task of rug making.

He took a break from his desk, reached for his cane and carefully made his way to the other end of the room where he told us his story.

Casper was born in the twin island state of Antigua and Barbuda fifty-nine (59) years ago, his lifestyle today is a far cry away from what it used to be in his early years.

In days gone by he was often referred to as a “jack of all trades”, having worked with the Public Works Department in the capital of St John’s, as a sailor, a gardener and a carpenter.

According to Casper he was capable of doing almost anything. But included in his active lifestyle were his demons of addiction – drinking and smoking.

“I used to love the rum and the cigarettes, nothing could stop me. As I worked, I smoked. When work was over, I would drink and I thought nothing of it, nothing at all. I was living the life”

Although Casper battled Diabetes and Hypertension, he was not fazed.

“I could do anything and not get sick, so the sugar and blood pressure did not really bother me”

Because he thought he had excellent vision he never had his eyes checked. Well, that was the case until one day he discovered that he had difficulty seeing.

“ I could see, I could always see well. But one day I found that I could not see much. Remember I used to drink the rum and smoke the cigarettes and I believe that led to my loss of sight. When I went to the Doctor for the check up he told me it was too late, it was too far gone. The smoking and rum drinking was not good for the sugar and the pressure and I also had Glaucoma”

While unable to say what exactly led to his blindness, he believes that his habits contributed to his vision loss.



He explained that although his Doctor warned him of the possibility of blindness, the warning was not heeded.

“I could still see but not as much and I continued drinking rum and smoking. That’s what happens when you don’t take care of yourself.

Eventually when the sight went I had no one to blame but myself, instead of taking care of myself I really preferred the rum and my cigarettes. I am the only one to blame”

“Let me tell you how bad it was, I would drink and smoke before taking my tea in the mornings” he lamented.

Casper can’t recall when he lost his sight entirely, but what he does know is that the day it happened, the smoking and drinking stopped immediately. He no longer had the desire for his vices.

“After I (went) blind I did away with the rum and cigarettes and tried to find my God, now I pray every night”

Today his daily routine has changed, no longer does he reach for a pack of cigarettes or a quart of white rum, every weekday he makes his way to the Antigua Society of and for the Blind, where he works on various projects and at the end of the day heads home.

"I like it here, it give me something to do, so I keep occupied."

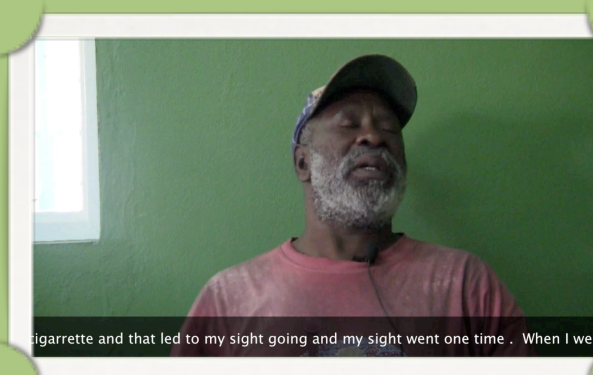
In spite of everything he is by no means a bitter man and takes everything in stride.

"I'm not taking it on, you see some people who have eye problems they take it on , they don't eat, they grieve and day"

And what of his message to others? It is quite simple.

"Take care of yourself, take care of your eyes, get your check-ups and don't smoke or drink, it is bad for your health. It is also a sin in the sight of God."

Video



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXMco9GgDYk>

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.

How can you help?

Please donate to CCB Eye Care Caribbean.

Donations may be made via our website www.eyecarecaribbean.com

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