

Cuba is advancing positively towards the goals of VISION 2020

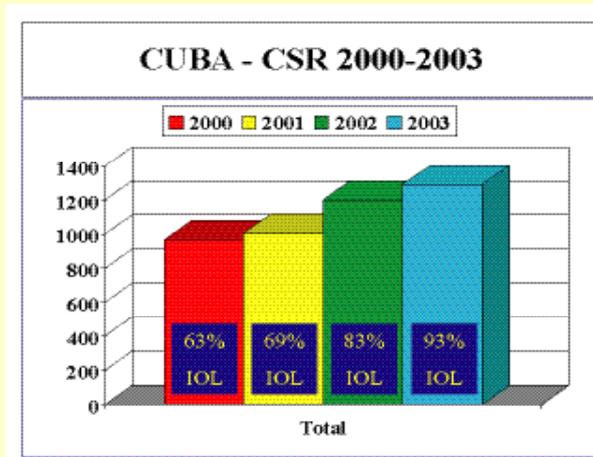
The National Eye Health Programme of Cuba (population 11.2 million with 620 ophthalmologists) is advancing positively toward the goals of VISION 2020. The number of **cataract** surgeries increased from 10,800 in 2000 to almost 15,000 in 2003, with the percentage receiving an IOL increasing from 63% to 93% (Table 1). This improvement was particularly impressive in provinces outside Havana. A Rapid Assessment of Cataract Surgical Services planned for April 2004 will help direct programme activities towards the more underserved provinces and establish a national baseline for future programme evaluation. The programme is a joint effort between the MoH and the Church Council of Cuba, supported by CBM and the German Ministry of Economic Collaboration.

In addition, a national programme to prevent blindness from **retinopathy of prematurity** has been established. The aim is to provide screening and treatment in all neonatal units in Cuba by the end of 2006.

A pilot **low vision programme** was initiated in 2003 in four of the twelve provinces with a view to expansion over the next few years. This programme is co-ordinated with the Ministries of Education and Health.

Table 1. Number of Cataract Surgeries in Cuba (estimated 95 % of all cataract surgeries performed in Cuba)

Year	# surgeries	% IOL	CSR
2000	10,827	63	964
2001	11,267	69	1,003
2002	13,461	83	1,199
2003	14,710	93	1,310
V2020 Goal	40,000	>98	3,000



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Photo: Hannah Kuper

The value of volunteers

Whilst carrying out our evaluation of the SAFE strategy to control trachoma in 8 countries, I have been struck by the contribution made by many volunteers. In addition to the impressive work carried out by the health teams, in some places we found community volunteers performing a valuable role. One example from Ethiopia springs to mind; despite slim resources and no promise of reward, a community health volunteer and member of a women's association, having learnt about trachoma during a one day training, used her initiative and skills to play her part in controlling trachoma by making her own teaching aids to raise awareness about trachoma in schools and in her community. While there are obviously many matters for debate when we consider what should and should not be expected of volunteers in primary health care, we should not forget the energy which can be generated in projects which allow people to feel that they can make a difference to the health of their community.

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Sight restored at 101: a story from China

"How many fingers do you see?"
 "Five" exclaimed an excited Sue-lan Feng who, at 101 years old, had been blind for two years; "it's great to have a bright future again at my age!"

During pre-surgery inspection, Dr He reminded Madam Feng to hold still. "You mean I can't even blink?" The dear old lady seriously wanted to clarify.

It took merely ten minutes, yet vision was restored for the centenarian lady who

had suffered from cataract for some twenty years. This was the first cataract surgery for a centenarian from Shenyang (population 7.2 million in north eastern China), but the second for He Eye Hospital Group.

The intraocular lens implantation was by no means without intricacies, considering the advanced age of the patient. Dr He chose phacoemulsification small incision ECCE as the procedure, not only to reduce any possible complications and risks, but

also to offer Madam Feng a painless experience, and a speedy recovery.

This episode benefited more than Madam Feng herself. Her daughter and son-in-law, 64 and 65 respectively, could take care of her easier now because their prayers for her restored vision were answered.

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