

REPORT ON THE RECENT EYE CAMP SPONSORED BY [CATARACTS ARE CURABLE,](#)

HELD AT KATAMINA DISPENSERY ON THE 12TH -14TH JANUARY, 2021.

The team departed from SZRECC at about 3pm of 11th January and arrived at Katamina about 6pm same day. Immediately we arrived, we were joined by our host, the Nurse-in charge of the facility and his team. Together we mounted a general cleaning exercise of the room identified as theatre. We continued cleaning till late in the night, and then I proceeded to Sambang to spend the night so that first thing in the morning I can arrange for the patients to be transported to the operation site at Katamina so we can start early. We planned to start surgeries on patients coming from far away: Sambaing and surroundings. In the morning of the 12th January 2021, we started surgeries at about 8.30am; we had re-screened the patients to rule-out any signs of infections and identify and label the eye to be operated. We operated on 13 patients before we break for lunch and 'JUMA' (Friday Prayer). The session resumed by 3.30pm lasted up to 7pm with an additional 8 patients operated upon. The operated patients were escorted to an identified room where they will spend the night, two rooms were identified, one for men and the other for women, so that the following day after their first dressing they will be evacuated back to Sambang in a 'Gele Gele' as you see in the picture.

Saturday 13th January, the session started much earlier and better organised as we divided ourselves by task; those screening, as new patients were still coming, those dilating and identifying the eyes to be operated and finally those in operating theatre. The screening team started their session with those who were operated upon the previous day. Their eye pads were removed, eyes clean, and then the smiling started on faces as a new world has been seen, all of them had a very good visual outcome. Some of the patients were blind for many years, they were just managing because they lived in a usual environment so they could move about but were not seeing normally. A total of 31 patients were operated on this day but were allowed to go spend the night at their homes and come the next day. Sunday 14th January was an interesting day at Katamina Health Post as all the patients came for their first dressing with amazing visual acuity, you could see the happiness, the smiles and laughter. No single patient had a complication from the surgery they were all educated on how to instil their drops in their

eyes and a pair of sunglasses given to each to protect them from sunlight and dust. The team finally left Katamina at about 10am to travel back to Serekunda when we had seen all those who had their surgeries performed.

I was disappointed as some of the patients identified as mature cataracts and were booked for surgery during our screening in December did not turn up from my own village of Sambang. Although most of those have one eye mature cataract so could see with the other eye. However, I later realised that this was due to fear of the unknown outcome, as a lot of them walked to Katamina in the evening of that Saturday to meet us and declare their readiness to have their surgeries, because they have seen the first batch who returned to the village with good vision. Unfortunately for them, we had already recruited as many as we could cope with because a lot of new patients came that day.

During our screening in December, we told those who have cataracts that we will seek for sponsor to come back and do a free eye camp, but we could not tell them when it will happen. As we became confident of the sponsor, we sent a list of names to the Village Health Worker at each area to inform them about our coming date for surgery so they prepare themselves. The plan was to give priority to those who have been screened and identified as mature operable cataract and to start with those from Sambang area because they are far away then to be followed by those from Katamina and surroundings.

COMMENTS

A total of 52 patients had their cataracts removed and intra-ocular Lens (IOL) implanted successfully. The 2 extra IOLs were given to me by the Administrator of SZRECC Mr. Amadou Bah as a contingency in case there is an issue that was unexpected. Each operated patient was given 2 bottles of steroid drops and pair of sun-glasses.

The exercise was very successful but tedious as there were no ophthalmic personnel in the area who could help prepare the ground in any form. I had to rely on the VHWs (Volunteer Health Workers) to disseminate information in the village; I thank all of them for their sacrifice and willingness.

The staff at Katamina Health post were very helpful and participated in every aspect of the exercise, I thank all of them for the efforts. The team from SZRECC did a wonderful job; I thank each and every one of them for the hard work and sacrifice.

I hereby recommend NEHP to allocate eye-health personnel in the Niamina West district to handle cases of eye problems as the nearest eye care centre is about 85 kilometers away and means of transport is not easy. In the meantime, an annual exercise like this will be highly recommended to reduce the burden of cataract blindness in the communities. The remaining cataract backlog in the area will have to wait for another opportunity like this one in the future.

Finally, all these would not have been possible if not the tireless efforts and sacrifices of Mr. and Mrs Phillips and their partners who donated the resources to the course. Be assured that you are improving quality of life of individuals you do not even know, thus adding value to their lives .We remain grateful to you.

Thank you

Alasana Touray