Dr Sanny Yuzhen Jiang & MedEther in the British Council for Prevention of Blindness 40th Anniversary Publication
Our Vision

To be widely recognised as a significant contributor to the prevention of blindness worldwide, by funding training and medical research.

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Our belief and our aim is that no one, anywhere in the world, should lose their sight if it can be prevented.

About BCPB

The British Council for Prevention of Blindness (BCPB) is a registered charity which funds innovative research and training work that seeds the development of local resources – skills, knowledge and expertise – to build programmes to save and restore sight in low income countries. BCPB fully supports the aims of Vision 2020: The Right To Sight

**Blindness:**

- Somewhere in the world, a child goes blind every minute.
- 80% of this blindness is avoidable. With adequate funding it could be treated or prevented.
- 90% of the world’s 39 million blind people live in low income countries.
- Interventions to prevent blindness are amongst the most cost-effective: a blind person requires care and rehabilitation and cannot usually work, so saving sight makes economic sense as well as transforming lives.
- Training one person to be a leader, trainer and advocate creates a cascade effect when they pass on their knowledge and skills to others who can go on to build eye care programmes in developing countries, to save the sight of many people and promote the development of new knowledge to help treat eye conditions.

**Our key achievements**

- We have funded some 160 eye care professionals from the world’s poorest countries to train in planning and managing eye care at regional and community level, and to undertake research into how best to prevent blindness in their own countries. They have gone on to become new leaders in blindness prevention in their home countries.
- Each of these new eye care leaders will save the sight of up to 40,000 people in the course of their career, and will on average train a further 200 people to save sight.
- Research funded by BCPB led directly to the discovery of the breakthrough eye medication Ivermectin. This is now used widely in Africa to prevent ‘river blindness’ (onchocerciasis) - a condition which once blinded millions of people.
Forty years ago, the British Council for Prevention of Blindness was founded to promote research into ways of preventing blindness around the world. At that time there were considerable efforts being made by charities to treat those affected by blindness in the developing world but it was evident that still more needed to be done by way of prevention if the scourge of blindness were ever to be overcome. Two men – John Wilson and Eric Boulter, who were already working with charities involved with the alleviation of blindness, recognised this need and decided to set up a body with the specific object of promoting research into ways in which blindness can be prevented, particularly in the developing world. Their vision led to the formation of the British Council for Prevention of Blindness.

It is self evident that there can be no single way to prevent blindness and to date many methods have been used throughout the world with varying degrees of success. Improvements in public health often hold the key. In the case of insect-borne disease, control of the vector can reduce transmission. Thus simple improvements in sanitation can reduce the incidence and severity of trachoma infection that is spread by flies. Mass drug treatment of at risk populations can also be a cost effective way of controlling disease as shown in the case of use of the drug Ivermectin in the treatment of river blindness.

**“Training is crucial to the fight against blindness”**

Blindness due to diseases such as diabetes and glaucoma can only be prevented by timely detection. Delay in treatment can mean irreversible changes have already taken place. Education and screening programmes offer the best chance of early recognition and treatment in such diseases and finding cost-effective ways of delivering these in the developing world will be the key to success.

Forty years on, BCPB can look back with pride on its contributions to many successful projects such as the use of Ivermectin and, more recently, the development of the PEEK photographic screening project. However, as populations continue to grow and age, the challenge remains and the work of BCPB must continue apace as there is still much to be done.

We shall continue to award grants not only to support primary research into disease prevention, but also to fund the education and training of overseas ophthalmologists. By supporting training in ophthalmic public health, practitioners can be provided with the necessary skills to identify the challenges and offer solutions in their work in blindness prevention in their home countries. Not only are they better equipped to enlist the support of governments and local politicians, a key element for any public health programme, they are also able to pass those skills to others on their return home, thereby widening the effectiveness of their training.

We remain firmly committed to continuing this important work as well as funding other programmes, such as the mentorship of ophthalmologists in the developing world by UK based experts in blindness prevention.

We believe that high quality research, education and training is crucial to the fight against blindness, and BCPB is committed to continuing its support in these areas.

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From the Chairman

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1995 was a memorable year in my life. With the dream of devoting my life to a career that could possibly change thousands of peoples' lives, I started a seven-year program pursuing MBBS and MSc degrees of clinical medicine in the top medical school in China, the Health Science Center of Peking University. I became an eye doctor with a special interest in the surgical treatment of cataracts - the worldwide leading cause of blindness. I spent a year in the rural counties of South China, working as a volunteer eye surgeon coming into close contact with many patients struggling in darkness and poverty. I was constantly amazed by the dramatic changes blindness prevention programs could bring and I can still clearly remember those sparkling eyes filled with happiness and gratitude after receiving surgery.

In 2008 following completion of fellowship programs in the USA and Singapore, I ran an internationally collaborative research and blindness prevention project in China known as ZAP investigating the preventive strategies for primary angle-closure glaucoma (PACG), a highly prevalent but potentially preventable eye disease amongst East Asians. Nearly 12,000 people participated in the screening survey and 889 individuals were eventually enrolled as study subjects. This project, which was generously sponsored by BCPB, was the commencement of my colourful and fulfilling journey with BCPB. It was also via involvement in this project that I got to know my respected PhD mentor, Professor Paul Foster.

Three years after the commencement of the ZAP trial, I was selected as an awardee of the BCPB PhD studentship program at the UK UCL Institute of Ophthalmology. During this PhD program, which served as an extended development of the research based on the ZAP trial, I carried out a series of data mining projects that focused on the descriptive epidemiology of glaucoma in urban China and the prevention of PACG.

Upon completion of my PHD, I was licenced as an ophthalmologist and started practising ophthalmology at Moorfields Eye Hospital. Alongside this, I also became an honorary senior research associate at UCL. Thanks to BCPB’s generous sponsorship, I worked with Mr Gus Gazzard, Consultant Ophthalmologist at Moorfields, and successfully established a China-based sister study of a large scale, multi-centre randomized controlled trial in the UK (the LiGHT Trial) which aims at finding a relatively more optimal treatment pathway in terms of health-related quality of life, cost-effectiveness and clinical outcomes. Also whilst working at Moorfields Eye Hospital, I was appointed as one of the key members of Moorfields’ Far East business development team. With strong support from the British and Chinese governments, we were able to establish a strategic research and educational partnership between the two largest eye centres in China and the UK.

Inspired by the business development experience at Moorfields, I started a business project focusing on international teleconsultation, which aims to serve as a platform for providing co-management between clinicians in the UK and China for Chinese patients suffering from severe and complex eye conditions. We have successfully set up a network of cooperating eye hospitals and clinics in 20 cities in China. For cooperating partners in China, we aim to assist health care providers in acquiring aid from the international community and to help train local doctors in China. For Chinese patients, we aim at supporting customers to overcome language barriers, lower financial thresholds and offer borderless care from globally renowned medical professionals in the UK.

The project aims to benefit patients by offering second opinions at an affordable cost, and serves as a training service for junior doctors, which in turn will help serve millions of patients in China.