RECOGNISING a need to improve vision care access for 26,000 local preschool children from low-income families, Stuart I. Brown, MD, Chairman and Professor, Department of Ophthalmology and colleagues at the University of California San Diego, decided to go mobile. The Save Our Children's Sight program, including the EyeMobile for Children in conjunction with the Ratner Children's Eye Center, operates in alliance with 150 San Diego Head Start preschool programs and San Diego's public school system.

"One in four children in school has an undetected eye problem. A child who cannot see, cannot read; a child who cannot read, cannot learn. What is his or her future?" commented Barbara Brody MPH, UCSD Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology and Director of the Division of Community Ophthalmology.

Trained school staff at low income preschools, under the guidance of Save Our Children's Sight, perform simple tests to find out which children are "at risk." Children who fail the screening tests then receive a full eye examination on the EyeMobile, which is complete with teddy bears wearing glasses and eye clinic equipment designed for young children.

If necessary, children can pick out glasses provided by the Lions Clubs. Occasionally, others may require further diagnostics and treatment intervention for paediatric cataracts, glaucoma, or in rare cases, ocular tumours. Paediatric ophthalmologists Dr David Granet and Dr Shira Robbins at the Ratner Children's Eye Center are available to evaluate and treat these children.

Since its inception in January 2000, the Save Our Children's Sight program has screened over 26,000 young children and provided 4,000 complete eye exams on the EyeMobile at no cost to the children’s families, thanks to funding from the Ratner and Foster families, Lions Clubs International Foundation, First 5 Commission of San Diego, other philanthropic individuals and foundations, and assistance from community leaders and volunteers.

The expertise of multilingual staff, including a vision screening coordinator, optometrists, mobile clinic manager, child development specialists, and a community outreach vision care coordinator keeps the many components of the program including the EyeMobile rolling along. Information technologies including electronic medical records and geographic information systems are used to optimise resources.

Follow-up not only allows the Save Our Children's Sight program to track each child’s progress after correction, and to evaluate the possible need for specialist treatment, but also to highlight the programme's goals for screening and child/parent/community education.

"It is part of our mission to talk with parents and to educate them that time is of the essence. Without testing, their child's vision could be permanently compromised," said Iliana Molina, Community Vision Care Coordinator.

Through children's storybooks and concise health educational materials for the adult learner, the Save Our Children's Sight staff and classroom teachers convey that improved vision leads to improved learning. The programme also stresses the need for vision care for young children, and the consistent use of corrective lens.

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Changing a child’s view of the world

Barbara Brody
Recent Developments in the Vision Care Industry

**ReZoom Multifocal approved**

AMO announced it had received FDA approval to market its new ReZoom multifocal intraocular lens. The acrylic three-piece IOL incorporates a new design that uses 'Balanced View Optics' to distribute light over five optical zones for enhanced restoration of visual function, providing distance, intermediate and near vision for reduced spectacle dependence. The company also makes several other refractive lenses including the Array, the first multifocal to reach the market; the Verisyse phakic IOL; and the Tecnis multifocal IOL. All have received the CE Mark in Europe for treatment of presbyopia. The Tecnis multifocal is now in clinical trials in the US.

**ReSTORing near and distance vision**

Alcon has joined the multifocal club, with the FDA approval of the Acrysof Restor lens for cataract patients with or without presbyopia. The multifocal lens uses an apodised diffractive technology designed to provide patients with a full range of near, intermediate and distance vision. In clinical trials, 80% of patients receiving the lens reported being spectacle independent. The company plans to begin shipping the lens in May following the annual meeting of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgeons in Washington.

**Visx Custom treatment for mixed astigmatism**

Visx reports it has received FDA approval to use its CustomVue wavefront-guided treatment for all forms of astigmatism, including myopic, hyperopic and mixed forms. The CustomVue platform incorporates the WaveScan WaveFront system and STAR S4 Excimer Laser System. The company recently sold its Fourier Wavefront Upgrade, which it says provides the highest resolution of the visual system available. The company also recently received FDA approval to market its iris registration system as part of its refractive laser surgery platform.

**Name change for Visijet**

Visijet announced a name change and will now be known as Advanced Refractive Technologies. The company markets the FDA-approved EpiLift System, used for performing EpiLASIK refractive surgery. The EpiLift system is manufactured in Germany by Gebauer Medizintechnik GmbH. The company recently received approval for the EpiLift System from the FDA. The company is also developing Pulsatome, which uses waterjet technology for cataract removal surgery.

**Anamed now Intralens**

Anamed, maker of intracorneal lenses for the correction of presbyopia, announced it would be changing its name to Intralens. The lenses are made from a proprietary micro-porous hydrogel material and will be trademarked under the name Intralens®. The company’s initial goal is to earn FDA approval for surgical correction of presbyopia. The company is conducting clinical trials in the United States for the correction of hyperopia up to +6.0 dioptres. The company is also conducting clinical studies at several international sites for the development of its lens to correct presbyopia.

**Staar raises capital**

Faced with a plummeting stock price and regulatory concerns, Staar Surgical announced a deal to sell 4,100,000 shares of newly issued common stock at a purchase price of $3.50 per share to institutional investors. The company is still awaiting FDA approval following concerns raised by the regulatory agency regarding quality control issues. The company’s product line includes silicone and Collamer IOL, the Pulsatome, which uses waterjet technology for cataract removal surgery. The company’s product line includes silicone and Collamer IOL, the Tecnis multifocal IOL, and the Array, the first multifocal to reach the market; the Verisyse phakic IOL, and the Tecnis multifocal IOL. All have received the CE Mark in Europe for treatment of presbyopia. The Tecnis multifocal is now in clinical trials in the US.

**Japanese license for Posurdex**

Allergan announced an exclusive agreement with Japanese company Sanwa Kagaku Kenkyusho to develop and market Posurdex in Japan. The market could be worth more than €130 million in Japan. Sanwa will pay Allergan a royalty based on net sales. Posurdex is an investigational, bio-erodable, extended release implant that delivers dexamethasone to back of the eye for the treatment of macular edema. The product is currently in worldwide Phase III clinical trials.

**Pfizer tightens its belt**

Pfizer, the world’s largest pharmaceutical company, announced that it expected earnings to decline slightly this year, and said it would continue cost-cutting efforts currently underway. The company plans to reduce annual costs by $4 billion by 2008. The company said it plans to sustain long-term growth through investments in innovative current and new medicines from its R&D pipeline. The company’s ophthalmic products include Xalatan (latanoprost) and Macugen (pegaptanib sodium). Other bestsellers include Norvasc (amlodipine), Lipitor (atorvastatin), Viagra (sildenafil), Zithromax (azithromycin), and COX-2 inhibitors Celebrex and Bextra.

**Ista gears up for Xibrom approval**

TTR Pharmaceuticals’ new drug application for Xibrom 0.09% for the treatment of ocular inflammation following cataract surgery. The company said it plans to launch the topical twice-daily non-steroidal anti-inflammatory solution during the second quarter of 2005. Ista said it would first need to acquire sufficient quantities of the product from its manufacturer, and would also need to expand its sales force. This is the third FDA approval for the company, following IstaTolol and Vitrase.

**Trablo studies discontinued**

Cambridge Antibody Technology announced it was terminated further development of experimental glaucoma agent Trablo (ferdelimubab, CAT-152) after the drug failed to meet its primary endpoint in Phase III clinical trials. Similar results were seen in the European Phase II/III clinical trial of the drug. Trablo is a human IgG4 monoclonal antibody that neutralises Transforming Growth Factor Beta 2 (TGFß2) - a protein produced in response to injury in the eye, for example following surgery for glaucoma.

**Bausch, Alcon end AREDS dispute**

Bausch & Lomb announced a settlement agreement ending its patent dispute with Alcon over that company’s Alcon’s Icops. Both companies produce nutritional supplements based on the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) results. The agreement provides a cross-licensing relationship that permits Alcon to continue to sell its AREDS-based nutraceutical product worldwide.