

BOOK REVIEWS

A Trilogy : Leaders...Ideals...Reality...
Set of 3 volumes. Compiled & Edited by Dr A S M Lim & Dr K H Lim.
XXVI International Congress of Ophthalmology. Singapore. 1990.

VOL 1: LEADERS IN OPHTHALMOLOGY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

Compiled and Edited by Dr K H Lim.

A readable publication on the development of Ophthalmology in some of the countries within the Asia-Pacific and Oceania region. Some of the more well-known figures in each country represented here have given a historical yet personal account and therefore each presentation does not follow a set format.

Included too are chapters on the history of the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology and prevention of blindness programmes in the countries of the region. Ophthalmologists with a feeling for historical details will find this book a useful reference.

Dr Robert C K Loh

VOL 2: MAJOR EYE CENTRES OF THE WORLD

Compiled & Edited by Dr K H Lim & Dr A S M Lim

I am no ophthalmologist but the book – Major Eye Centres of the World – proved very interesting, enlightening and informative. It is an eye-opener to the many aspects of Ophthalmology that local medical students would never know about. Eye is one of the short postings that forms part of the exposure to the surgical discipline of the medical undergraduate curriculum. You may or may not be interested in Ophthalmology as a result of that short sojourn, usually in the pre-Final year. This book will most likely influence you positively to develop a liking, if not a love, for Ophthalmology.

There is no doubt that sight is a precious sense. Where there is no vision the people perish. As you peruse this volume, you cannot help but be struck by the high quality print, high class photographs and high powered text – all of which informs, stimulates and perhaps convinces you that Ophthalmology is the medical specialty to be in. Words cannot do justice to the experience of even just flipping through its pages. How would you feel, seeing patients with eyes covered by bandages lying on the floor on a bamboo mat. It is the free ward in India.

As your finger turns the pages, your eyes take in the pictures and the words, your mind digests it all, you tour the world-renown eye centres. This multiauthored text describes in sufficient detail what the aspirations each centre has, its facilities and its staff. It lists how each subdivides Ophthalmology into the various subspecialties

to tackle patient care and initiate research. While it is expected of the developed countries like the USA, Britain and Australia to boast their equipment, be not surprised that all the other centres also are high-tech, doing good work and involved in great research.

Why did I read this book? I am interested in knowing about the advances in Ophthalmology – where they are occurring, who are the people in the thick of it, their training programmes for residents and nurses. Most of all, I was keen to know what is going on right here in Singapore. The Singapore National Eye Centre is highlighted in 8 pages. Many names of our colleagues are mentioned. Though it may be construed as advertising, the information dished out would prove useful to both doctors and patients. Then compare this with the other world centres and appreciate the daunting tasks ahead to keep up with world trends. Appreciate also what Singapore already has achieved in the world of Ophthalmology.

The 26th International Congress of Ophthalmology has come and gone. These 3 volumes will remain – on the desks or in libraries of many of the world's great Ophthalmologists. Why not yours?

Dr Chee Yam Cheng
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VOL 3 : WORLD'S MAJOR BLINDING CONDITIONS

Second edition. Formerly published as VISION by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness

Compiled & Edited by Dr A S M Lim

March 1990 saw the successful conclusion of the XXVI International Congress of Ophthalmology (ICO), an event proudly witnessed by local ophthalmologists who played host to their counterparts from the international community. World's Major Blinding Conditions (WMBC), the second edition of what was formerly VISION, published by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, is compiled and edited by Dr Arthur Lim, the ICO President, in conjunction with the Congress. He has drawn contributions from eminent ophthalmologists all over the world, who in sharing their experiences, give a most enlightening insight into the various blinding conditions peculiar to their country of origin and the way they are tackled.

The book is sturdily bound in hard cover, running to 203 pages of glossy paper throughout. Most of the photographs are in luxuriant colour and there are tables, charts and maps to complement the text. All this is something I have come to expect of any book written by Dr Lim, judging from his writing portfolio.

The text begins with an Introduction by Dr Lim touching on the major causes of mass blindness in Asia, namely malnutrition, infection, trauma, glaucoma, diabetes and of course, cataract. Dr Lim, in his usual dramatic manner, extols the virtue of modern technology in combatting these problems and, in the same breath, laments the lack of it in the poorer countries such as Cambodia, Bangladesh, rural parts of India and the Philippines which bear the brunt of blinding conditions that would otherwise be alleviated by accessibility to modern facilities.

Cataract is and will remain beyond the 20th century, at the top of the ophthalmic surgeon's priority list in Asia. The numbers of the aged are projected to increase tremendously over the years. It appears to Dr Lim that eye camps are not the solution. In fact, a study has shown that complications of cataract surgery in eye camps may leave some 50% of patients no better than they were pre-operatively. The long-term solution, Dr Lim believes, lies in the prevention of cataracts or if not, then at least a delay in its development. Intra-ocular lens implants definitely improve visual prognosis but implant insertion which requires special training and sophisticated equipment certainly would not be appropriate in eye camps. Dr Lim realises then that the biggest challenge in tackling the world's major blinding conditions is that of bringing modern technology to the doorstep of rural communities and this may prove to be a most formidable task.

Section I of the book after the Introduction deals with the preventive aspect of world blindness. Professor Barrie R Jones cites trachoma, onchocerciasis, xerophthalmia and cataract as the four main causes of preventable or remediable blindness and believes that multi-disciplinary training in preventive Ophthalmology is the key to

elimination of avoidable blindness. Dr A Edward Maumenee, past President of the International Council of Ophthalmology, describes the merging of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind and the International Association for Prevention of Blindness in 1975, into a single organization called the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. From this platform, initially under the presidency of Sir John Wilson, much has been done since to prevent blindness and cure treatable blindness throughout the world.

In Section II, various blinding disorders, viz. cataract, glaucoma, malnutrition, infection, trauma and diabetes are delved into. Most captivating to me was the account of how eye camps in Bangladesh are run, the way surgeons operate – 'no-touch' technique without gloves, and the numbers – one hundred operations a day! In the glaucoma section, the various modalities of treatment are described. Xerophthalmia, due to Vitamin A deficiency, is extensively reported on. It is rather unfortunate that amongst the blinding ocular infections, trachoma is given scant coverage despite its infamous reputation as "the most important single cause of preventable blindness", in the words of Mr Tarizzo, Manager of the WHO Prevention of Blindness Programme. The section on diabetes emphasizes screening and photocoagulation therapy as paramount in blindness prevention from diabetic retinopathy.

The third section of the book looks at the blindness situation in India and resident training in blindness prevention and visual rehabilitation in various countries. This volume is concluded by a reprint of a paper published in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Ophthalmology, in which Dr Arthur Lim gives a view of Ophthalmology in Asia in the year 2000. Dr Lim voices much excitement in the development of ophthalmic practice by the turn of the century. He believes that Ophthalmology will emerge as one of the most important surgical disciplines, that there will be a three-fold increase in the number of ophthalmologists, that subspecialisation will be firmly established and that the private sector will play an increasingly important role in major ophthalmic development.

Dr Lim's vision for the future is interesting, and so are the contents of this book. WMBC makes an enjoyable read even to the non-specialist and it contains a wealth of statistics that paint a vivid picture of what is and what will be. What it lacks, however, is a list of references for further reading but this is a minor oversight. It is altogether a worthwhile desk companion to anyone interested in preventive eye-care.

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