

EYE DONATION: A GIFT OF BEAUTY, A RETURN FOR ETERNITY

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INTRODUCTION

“NETRAM PRADHANAM SERVENDRIYANAM”

Eye donation is an act of donating one’s eyes after his/her death. Only corneal blinds can be benefitted through this process not other blinds. It is an act of charity, purely for the benefit of the society and is totally voluntary.¹

Corneal diseases are a significant cause of visual impairment and blindness in the developing world. The major causes of corneal blindness include trachoma, corneal ulceration following xerophthalmia due to vitamin A deficiency, ophthalmia neonatorum, and the use of harmful traditional medicines, onchocerciasis, leprosy, and ocular trauma.²⁻⁴

Blindness from corneal opacity is a significant public health burden that is estimated to affect 1.5 million persons and accounts for about 4% of cases of blindness worldwide.⁵ A disproportionate share of corneal blindness falls on Asia, where estimates of corneal

blindness in China have ranged from 10 to 15% of all blindness.^{6, 7} Similarly, the Andhra Pradesh Eye Disease Study in India found the prevalence of corneal blindness to be 0.13%, which constituted 9% of all blindness.⁸

Corneal transplantation is an effective treatment option for many patients with corneal disease, with a high success rate in restoring sight. Unfortunately, a major limiting factor in performing corneal transplants is availability of donor tissue, especially in Asian nations.⁹ A recent global survey of eye banking and corneal transplantation quantified the drastic mismatch between supply and demand of donor corneas worldwide, finding only 1 cornea available for every 70 needed.¹⁰ The shortage of available corneal tissue highlights the importance of exploring limiting factors in corneal donation worldwide. The purpose of this review is to aware about corneal donation worldwide and to use this information to identify possible interventions to increase rates of cornea donation.

IMPORTANCE OF EYEDONATION

Apart from a few reasons why certain conditions cannot be cured, most people suffer from curable ailments, especially those that can be cured with the help of donated eyes. In India nearly 2- 3 million people suffer from corneal blindness which could be cured through eye donation. Cornea is a clear tissue in our eyes, which allows light to pass through, enabling the brain in comprehending shapes and colours. A person is said to be suffering from corneal blindness when the cornea gets cloudy or obstructed in some other way. This reduces visibility. Now, this can be cured with the help of eye donation, which is an act of donating eye posthumously. It is completely altruistic in nature and done with larger goal of helping other either directly by enabling them to see or contributing to the development of new treatment plans by helping with scientific research.¹¹

FACTS ABOUT EYE DONATION:

- Eyes can be donated only after death.
- Eyes must be removed within 4 - 6 hours after death.
- Eyes can be removed by a registered medical practitioner only.
- The eye bank team will visit the home of the deceased or the hospital to remove the eyes.
- Eye removal does not delay the funeral since the entire procedure takes 20-30 minutes only.

- A small quantity of blood will be drawn to rule out communicable diseases.
- Eye retrieval does not cause disfigurement.
- Religions are for eye donation.
- The identities of both the donor and the recipient are kept confidential.

WHO CAN DONATE EYE?

Eye donors could be of any age group or sex. People who use spectacles, diabetics, patients with high blood pressure, asthma patients and those without communicable diseases can donate eyes.

WHO CANNOT DONATE EYES?

Eyes will not be collected if the death has occurred due to following diseases or conditions:

- AIDS/hepatitis B
- Rabies
- Septicemia
- Leukemia
- Certain cancers of head and neck
- Encephalitis
- Hodgkin's lymphoma

EYE DONATION PROCEDURE:

Inquire about the nearest eye collection centre/eye bank, which is mostly located at the medical college or any eye hospital that is close to your area. Register yourself for the eye donation where you have to pledge and provide details. After completion of all formalities, you will be provided with an Eye Donation card.

STEPS TO BE TAKEN DURING EYE DONATION:

- Call the nearest eye bank within six hours of the death of the person.
- Switch off fans and keep ACs on, if available.
- Close the eye lids gently and keep a moist cloth over eyes.
- Raise head with a pillow.

CONCLUSION

Eye donation is done after death. So eye donation should be encouraged in a large scale, as one of the best means of social services. To enable another person obtain vision is one of the best forms of charity. Even after death the donor lives in the eyes of recipient. Eyes from a

dead person can enable two blind people to acquire vision. In the famous ancient Sanskrit epic Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta, there is a line said by Lord Krishna to Arjun, which depicts the importance of eyes “*Netram Pradhanam Servendriyanam*” (Translation: Eyes are the precious gift given to the humans by the Almighty), **So, donating the eye is the most precious gift human can ever give! In the world of complete darkness, seeing your loved ones again can be nothing more than a dream!**

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