



Seva Canada Society • 100-2000 West 12th Ave., Vancouver, BC V6J 2G2
Tel: 604-713-6622 Fax: 604-733-4292 Toll free 1-877-460-6622 www.seva.ca

MEDIA RELEASE

Seva Canada Fights Blindness in AIDS Patients ***New program to prevent AIDS-related blindness in developing countries***

VANCOUVER, BC (May 30, 2011) Seva Canada (www.seva.ca), a Vancouver-based eye care charity, is funding a special program to train health professionals in the developing world to detect and prevent blindness in AIDS patients.

Research supported by Seva has found that cytomegalovirus (CMV) retinitis is causing unnecessary blindness and mortality in AIDS patients in many impoverished countries. CMV retinitis is a viral infection of the retina caused by cytomegalovirus – a cousin of herpes and one of the primary infections in people with advanced AIDS.

The research was led by Dr. David Heiden, a long-time Seva consultant and an ophthalmologist at the California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco, and was conducted in collaboration with Médecins Sans Frontières and other groups.

The AIDS Eye Initiative, started by Seva Foundation in the United States and now also funded by Seva Canada, is designed to fight the growing problem of blindness in AIDS patients through expanding the capacity of health workers to detect and treat CMV infection at the primary care level.

Dr. Suzanne Gilbert, Director of Seva's Center for Innovation in Eye Care in Berkeley, CA, says the research sheds light on a growing cause of blindness in developing countries that had been overlooked until now. "CMV retinitis just hadn't caught the attention of international eye care organizations. But this research makes it clear — if we want to prevent blindness in developing countries being hit hard by the AIDS pandemic, we need to tackle this issue."

Over 90% of avoidable blindness in patients with HIV/AIDS is caused by CMV infection but there has been little capacity to diagnose or treat this infection in developing countries. Seva's program will make established eye examination and treatment techniques part of the standard care of AIDS patients at the primary care level in resource-poor settings.

Between 5% and 25% of HIV patients will get CMV retinitis; this means 1.7 – 8.5 million people will have potentially blinding CMV retinitis. Early diagnosis is critical to prevent blindness and mortality in these patients.

So far, programs are underway in India, Cambodia, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Myanmar and China.

For more information, please contact:

Penny Lyons, Executive Director, Seva Canada
604-713-6622 director@seva.ca