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Training system for ophthalmologists from rural China: Experience from Joint Shantou International Eye Center

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In China, 70% of the residents are living in rural areas while most of the medical resources are held by large and medium cities. The imbalanced distribution of medical resources results in shortage of medical service in rural areas. It was reported that there were 24,000 ophthalmologists in China in 2004, only half of which had received training for surgery. Moreover, most of the surgeons concentrated in cities. Cataract is the leading cause of blindness in China. The cataract surgical rate (CSR) was reported to be 446 cases in 2004 and 1400 cases in 2015 per million population, which are far bellowed other countries such as India. Lack or cataract surgeons in rural areas was an important reason for it. For the last ten years, efforts have been made to increase CSR in China, which includes development of training system for ophthalmologist. Joint Shantou International Eye Center (JSIEC) of Shantou University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong is a non-profit tertiary eye hospital under the health department of Guangdong province and the fifth affiliated hospital of Shantou university medical college (SUMC). Founded in 2002, JSIEC has been devoted to training of ophthalmologists and cataract surgeons, especially for ophthalmologists from rural areas. Currently, JSIEC is supporting 5 training projects as well as charity surgery, which includes "Caring is Hip", "Project Version", "Lifeline Express", "Lifeline Express Microsurgery Training Center" and "ASCRS Foundation Project Vision Chang Cataract Surgery Training Center". The core idea of training is based on the famous Chinese proverb "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime". Up to date, the aforementioned training programs have covered 111 regions throughout China and performed 150,000 cataract surgeries by 427 surgeons trained by JSIEC. In summary, JSIEC has developed a success training system, which has helped to improve the cataract surgical rate in rural areas of China.

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