

# Blinded for want of eye specialists

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

**Rajahmundry, Oct 11:** There is just one ophthalmologist for one lakh people in East Godavari district. More alarming, specialised eye-care has become an urban prerogative while the rural poor suffer silently with the disability.

There are an estimated 88,320 blind persons in the district besides 38,860 cataract blinds. Another 14,400 were rendered blind due to refractive errors of the eye. But there are only 40 specialised ophthalmologists and eight organisations

working exclusively for eye-care.

There is no ophthalmologist in Sankhavaram, Yeleswaram and the nine agency mandals

in the district.

The same is the case with mandals like Gangavaram, Seetanagaram, Gokavaram and Pamarru. Even in towns like Mandapet and Ramachandrapuram there are only visiting ophthalmologists. There are referral hospitals in the Agency

area but only ophthalmic assistants are available there.

"Eighty per cent of blindness is avoidable if detected at an early stage. Unfortunately, as

many as 2.40 lakh children have become blind and 75 per cent of their visual impairment was preventable and curable," says S Chandrasekhar of the Kakinada-based Sri Kiran Institute of Ophthalmology. "Significantly, 30 per cent of the surgeries are performed

only to save the second eye after the first one is lost and only one-third of the needy are availing the eye-care services," says K Madhu, executive

director of Gowthami Eye Institute, Rajahmundry.

Organisations involved in eye care are increasingly feeling the need for rural-level network. "Creating awareness about basic eye care, training people in identifying eye problems early and setting up a

bridge between advanced eye-care and the needy are the key to success in our fight for sight," according to ophthalmologist K Madhavi.

The Sri Kiran Institute has already conducted eye tests for 95,000 schoolchildren and found 15 per cent of them to be suffering from sight-related problems. "We have already trained 80 teachers and MEOs for identifying sight defects. We are also planning to train village elders in this," Chandrasekhar says.

## World Sight Day on October 13

Enaadu 9<sup>th</sup> Oct 2005

Enaadu 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct 2005

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