Updates from the Field

THE OUTREACH TEAM RETURNS TO THE NAVAJO NATION

DECEMBER 2013

BACKGROUND

The Outreach Division at the John A. Moran Eye Center (JMEC) is dedicated to providing eye care in developing areas around the world and throughout its home state of Utah. In September and December 2013, teams from JMEC traveled to the Utah strip of the Navajo Nation to conduct vision screenings and eye exams to identify patients in need of sight-restoring surgery. Prior to the team’s arrival on December 13th, the principal of Tse'bi'i'nidzisgai Elementary School, Lisa Young, and school nurse, Lisa Wright, performed vision pre-screenings to identify children in need of eye exams. They determined that 35 percent of the school’s population need additional ophthalmic care.

The Utah strip of the Navajo Nation, located approximately 380 miles south of Salt Lake City, is one of the most underserved, isolated, and neglected regions in the lower United States. Lack of access to specialized health care plagues this region and its people, and the overall impact of poverty has created an urgent and critical need for eye care delivery, especially among children.

The Moran’s Outreach Division, in partnership with the United Navajo Health Systems, Inc. (UNHS), has made a long-term commitment to deliver eye care on the Utah strip of the Navajo Nation for both adults and children.

THE TEAM

MORAN PHYSICIANS AND STAFF

- Amy Beagley, Pediatric Administrative Support
- Justin Beagley, Volunteer
- Julie Crandall, COA, Outreach Division Project Coordinator
- Robert Hoffman, MD
- Carolyn Hoffman, Volunteer
- Laura Jane Pehrson, RN
- Brynlie Reid, Volunteer
- Heidi Reid, Development Specialist
- Bonnie Vincent, Volunteer
- Bryan Vincent, OD
- Michael Yei, Outreach Division Manager
- Marielle Young, MD
- Tom Young, Volunteer

DAY BY DAY

DECEMBER 13, 2013

The JMEC team arrived at the Tse'bi'i'nidzisgai Elementary School at 7:00 am to set up vision screening stations in the school’s large gymnasium and surrounding areas. They created screening rooms in the gymnasium storage closets and nearby classrooms. They also set up two visual acuity exam lanes, a visual fields checking station, a dilation station, and a registration area on the main gymnasium floor. At 8:00 am, the students started streaming in. Unfortunately, many of their consent forms were not signed, restricting the number of pediatric patients who could be examined by JMEC physicians. By the end of the day, the Moran team screened 39 children. The darkly pigmented irises of the patients required much more time to dilate, some as long as 45 minutes, limiting the number of screenings that could be completed within school hours.
DECEMBER 14, 2013
Many children arrived again without the signed consent forms necessary to perform dilated exams. As a result, the Moran team opened up the vision screening to children’s family members, the local Head Start program, and other adults living in Monument Valley. JMEC physicians and volunteers worked hard to see every patient. By the end of the day, the team completed 70 eye exams.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT
In addition, the Moran team collected a great deal of data that will be used to prioritize the eye care needs of children living on the Utah strip of the Navajo Nation. According to Dr. Marielle Young, the most common pediatric eye conditions detected (in no particular order) were uncorrected refractive errors, astigmatism, amblyopia, and myopia.

FUTURE PLANS
In partnership with UNHS, a team of Moran physicians plans to travel to the Navajo Nation to perform sight-restoring surgeries. They will treat patients suffering from curable eye diseases that were identified during Moran’s multiple screenings. Surgical missions will begin in Fall 2014.

Michael Yei, Moran’s Outreach Division manager, and Julie Crandall, COA, will return to Monument Valley in January 2014 to tour existing medical facilities and identify locations to be used for upcoming eye surgeries. Moran’s Outreach team is working to organize vision screenings for every child on the Navajo Nation within the next year. They are seeking the involvement of various Navajo organizations, such as the San Juan School District, local Head Start programs, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In August 2014, Moran physicians and staff will host a vision screening training session for school nurses in Monument Valley and the surrounding areas. Screening kits will be provided to all participants. The goal is to identify patients who need the specialized care of pediatric ophthalmologists.