

High altitude, over-the-counter drugs slowly blind Kargil boy

JBS Umanadh

HYDERABAD: For Mohammad Husain, the last of the seven children of Ghulam Mohammad, a labourer living in the Baroo town of Kargil district in Jammu and Kashmir, the 12th standard exams were like life and death. He was slowly losing his vision.

He went to a local doctor for irritation in his eyes and the doctor prescribed some eye drops. A week into the treatment, which gave him temporary relief, Husain turned partially blind. The poor student, who failed in two out of five subjects, came to know about an eye camp in Leh (Ladakh), 296 km from Baroo, through his uncle Mohammad Issa who works at Leh airport.

The camp was conducted by Bill Kite, a philanthropist from the US who has been working with the locals for the past 21 years, in association with the Hyderabad-based LV Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI).

Almost 400 students and 100 elders at Siddhartha and Lamdon schools were screened at the camp. Clinical



Mohammad Husain at the Hyderabad-based LV Prasad Eye Institute. JBS UMANADH

Associate Uday Adepalli and Research Optometrist Veerendranath Pesala of the LVPEI found that Husain suffered from glaucoma, induced by the use of topical steroids pre-

scribed by the Kargil physicians. The team also found that a majority of the school-children in Ladakh suffered from some kind of irritation in their eyes, just like Husain.

“It was steroid-induced glaucoma. There will be no symptoms. By the time the patient understands the problem he or she will lose vision,” said Dr Sirisha Senthil, who is treating Husain at the LVPEI in Hyderabad. After Husain was air-dashed to the eye institute, with the financial assistance of Bill Kite, Dr Sirisha performed two surgeries on the boy, the latest on Tuesday.

“He will be fit to travel back home by next week, just in time to take the examination and clear the two subjects he failed before coming to Hyderabad,” she said.

“The use of these steroids is not limited to far-flung areas of the country but also in other parts. When Husain was brought here, the surface pressure on both of his eyes was more than 40 (intra-ocular Pressure),” Dr Senthil said, indicating the un mindful use of over-the-counter eye drops available at medical stores.

“I have been treated well by the local people, I will miss Hyderabad,” a specta-

cler Husain said. Husain is staying at a guest house near the hospital. Though the boy missed his parents, he also knew that they couldn't afford to travel such long distances.

After the Husain episode, the LVPEI has decided to train three students from the Ladakh region in optometry and run a permanent centre in the high altitude region.

“We are hopeful of establishing our vision centre in Leh by next year. As we have realised that high altitude causes dryness of eyes which causes irritation and red pigmentation of eyes in school children, we have distributed 500 sunglasses to the children donated by Mr Kite,” Dr Virender S Sangawan, director, Centre for Ocular Regeneration at LVPEI, said.

The distribution was taken up through the Dalai Lama. Locals were encouraged to make sunglasses a part of the school uniform for children to reduce ocular surface disorders, similar to the trouble that Husain has undergone.

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