

# Fact Sheet: Cataract

## CCBRT's eye department

CCBRT's eye department was set up in 2000 to offer affordable and high quality eye services for people who are blind or whose vision is impaired. The department is staffed by four ophthalmologists, four assistant medical officers, 52 nurses and two low vision therapists.

Every day they screen over 200 people for various eye problems. Our eye surgeons are able to perform surgical procedures for cataract, glaucoma, eye trauma, tumours, trachoma and laser treatment for diabetes.

CCBRT surgeons treat thousands of men, women and children for cataract every year. Some people come direct to the hospital and others are referred for treatment by other medical establishments or by our own mobile outreach team.

In the majority of cases, a simple surgical procedure can restore the sight of a child or adult with cataract.



## About Cataract

A cataract is a clouding of the lens in the eye that affects vision and eventually leads to blindness. Cataract is related to ageing and is very common in older people. A cataract can occur in either or both eyes and is the leading cause of blindness in the world. Yet cataract can easily be treated.

There are four different types of cataract.

- Age related cataract is the most common form of cataract.
- Secondary cataract occurs after uveitis (inflammation of the middle layer of the eye) or the use of drugs such as steroids. Secondary cataract can also develop in people who have other health problems, such as diabetes.
- Traumatic cataract develops after eye injury, sometimes years later.
- Congenital cataract, occurs in babies born with cataracts or develops in early childhood, often in both eyes.

## Causes and Treatment

Most cataracts are caused by a metabolic disorder and ageing of the body tissues. Cataract can also be congenital or hereditary. Risk factors are diabetes, injuries of the eye, smoking and radiation.

To restore sight, the opacity or clouded lens needs to be surgically removed and replaced by an intra-ocular lens. In adults, the procedure can generally be done under local anaesthetic and takes around half an hour to do. Young children tend to have cataract surgery under general anaesthetic.

The day after surgery most patients find their sight returning within minutes of the dressing being removed. In the case of children with congenital cataract, vision often takes longer to appear.

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### About CCBRT

CCBRT is a Tanzanian NGO established in 1994 to care for people living with disabilities who are among the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the country. CCBRT is now Tanzania's largest indigenous provider of disability and rehabilitation services with 120,000 adults and children with disabilities and their caregivers accessing our services each year. The organisation comprises a disability hospital in Dar es Salaam, community programmes in and around Dar es Salaam and Moshi, a training unit and an advocacy unit.

We are able to treat disabilities such as eye problems (low vision, cataract, glaucoma etc), cleft lip, cleft palate, club-foot, bow legs and other congenital deformities, burn scar-contractions, fistula, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and hearing impairments. Our services include screenings, consultations, surgery, physiotherapy, provision of prosthetics, community and home based care, as well as education and economic empowerment initiatives.

### Mobile outreach programme

Many people do not know that their vision can be improved or lack the funds to seek medical treatment. Our mobile outreach team works in the communities in a 350 km radius around Dar es Salaam conducting screenings and raising awareness that many disabilities, such as cataract, can be treated. In 2009, the mobile team made 49 separate trips, carried out 21,000 consultations and referred over 800 people to the disability hospital for further treatment giving them free transport to and from CCBRT. Through the mobile referrals, 605 people had cataract surgery. Without intervention from the mobile team, these 605 people are likely to have remained blind or vision impaired.

### Cataract statistics

In 2009, CCBRT carried out:

- 73,156 eye consultations;
- 4,289 people were found to have cataract;
- 3,844 cataract operations were carried out on adults;
- 445 cataract operations were on children.

### Eye training at CCBRT

We firmly believe that it is very important to make our work sustainable. That is why we put so much focus on training and that is why we centre not just on the cure but also on rehabilitation and the integration of our clients back into community life. CCBRT's eye department has a busy and continuous training programme for doctors and surgeons from Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa. It offers highly regarded Fellowships in Paediatric Ophthalmology and Retina Vitrectomy as well as ophthalmic assistant training for 20 nurses annually.



The milky white cloud in 11 year old Hamis's right eye is cataract. When he covered his left eye, 'everything was darkness' and that frightened him. The young boy from Tanga fell behind in his school work and often his good eye would become tired and sore. Hamis lived like this for a year with the family, subsistence farmers, unable to pay for transport to hospital or medical treatment. When there was enough money for the bus fare to Dar es Salaam, Hamis was brought to CCBRT.

During surgery under a general anaesthetic, a small incision was made in the boy's right eye; the lens with the cataract was removed and replaced with a plastic lens. It took just 30 minutes to perform this sight restoring operation and the family made just a small contribution towards the cost of the procedure and hospital stay. The following day, a short while after the dressing was removed, Hamis could see again from both eyes.

### Cost of cataract treatment

At CCBRT, those who can afford to pay, contribute just 70,000 Tanzanian shillings (\$55) for the cataract operation, consultations, hospital stay and two months after care. This fee is heavily subsidised and the actual cost to the hospital is around \$100.

CCBRT has a unique payment system whereby the very poorest people are treated for free, people who are able to contribute to the cost of their treatment only pay what they can actually afford, while wealthier patients pay the full cost of treatment and can opt for additional extras while in hospital. In so doing, they subsidise the cost of treatment for the poorest people. All children under five years of age are treated for free.

Approximately 20% of our hospital expenditure is paid for by contributions from our patients and the remainder comes from welcome support from our partners.

### Contact details

For more information about CCBRT and development partnerships, please contact Erwin Telemans, CCBRT's CEO: email: [erwintelemans@ccbrt.or.tz](mailto:erwintelemans@ccbrt.or.tz). For corporate sponsorship/fundraising, please contact Kira Thomas: email: [kira.thomas@ccbrt.or.tz](mailto:kira.thomas@ccbrt.or.tz). Tel: 00 255 (0) 22 260 1543.

**Thank you for your interest in CCBRT.**