

Speech of Professor
Barrie Russel Jones
Winner of King Faisal International Prize
For Medicine 1987/1407H.
Sunday 8.3.1987 (8.7.1407A.H.)

Your Majesty

I am deeply appreciative of this great personal honor. This highest academic accolade in scientific medicine and the great generosity that you have bestowed on me. Sir, may I thank you and the King Faisal International Prize Board.

Now I would like to say a few words on behalf of those in every country who are aware of the world's 28 million people who are so blind that they cannot count fingers a few meters away.

The challenge is that about 80% of this blindness could be either prevented or cured at minimal cost. But only when basic services for personal hygiene and health are brought to the communities in need.

Those services must include the widespread use of simple preventive eye care in the home and nearby, along with provision of a basic surgical treatment for cataract and eyelids, within easy reach, supported by the referral of occasional cases to specialist eye hospital units that is needed for the more complex case.

It has been my passion, in research for deeper understanding of the pathways to massive blindness in a community, to remove barriers to the elimination of this scourge. It has been a drive to develop a sound scientific and practical basis for optimism that blindness can be thus controlled within reasonable resource constraints by implementing carefully selected and rather simple packages of health promotion, preventive care and peripherally delivered curative surgery.

These broader ways of looking at blinding eye disease take the action far beyond the limitations of ordinary curative ophthalmology and center on improving the eye health of communities.

The development and dissemination of these concepts and the associated skills have required new integrative "schools" that bridge previous academic divisions and professional, barriers in order to train a new cadre of public health oriented ophthalmologists and others for widespread leadership in this field. The International Centre for Eye Health was established for this purpose in London and has been followed, as hoped, by new "schools" in other countries.

Several countries have carried out national or regional surveys of blindness and blindness disease to provide a sound basis for planning. Notable has been the survey of blindness in this Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in a few years you will have the opportunity for selective repeat surveys

to determine those blinding processes that are continuing to operate and thus to provide the basis for planning into the next century.

All those concerned with the world movement for control of blindness would wish to applaud your action in designating Prevention of Blindness as the subject for the King Faisal International Prize in Medicine in 1986. This far sighted action should give a welcome visibility, all around the world, for the scientific and humanitarian validity of this endeavor. May it hasten the implementation of effective national programmes for prevention of blindness in many countries.