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Rotary sponsors doctor's visit from Calcutta, India

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Dr. V.K. Raju, an ophthalmologist on the Mon General medical staff, recently hosted a visiting ophthalmologist from Calcutta, India, who came to the United States to learn how patients are cared for in this country.

Dr. Dipanjan Pal's visit was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Morgantown, along with the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the Eye Foundation of American. During the past 30 years, more than 400 ophthalmic physician exchanges have occurred between the United States, Canada, Britain and India. The purpose of these exchanges is to reduce the rate of avoidable blindness and visual impairment in these countries.

The Rotary guest ophthalmologists come to the United States for two weeks. The first week is spent in a community where they experience professional, educational, cultural and social activities. During the second week, they attend the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, where they learn about the latest ophthalmic technology and equipment. Upon returning home, they share what they learned with their colleagues. Through participation in the project, the doctors update their skills, broaden their knowledge, and establish professional relationships.

Pal, who has been an ophthalmologist since 1996, practices at the Priyamvada Birla Aravind Eye Hospital in Calcutta where he is a consultant in glaucoma services. The Aravind Eye Care system in India is the world's largest eye care provider. The aim of this hospital system is to always be thinking about affordability and accessibility.

The Eye Foundation of America has founded two institutions in India. The latest is Goutami Eye Institute in southern India, which concentrates on the prevention and cure of blindness and visual prob-



Submitted photo

Dr. V.K. Raju, (seated) shows Dr. Dipanjan Pal, a visiting ophthalmologist from India, a handheld device used to measure eye pressure and screen for glaucoma. Pal spent the week of Oct. 29-Nov. 6 observing Raju as part of an educational exchange program.

has been changing rapidly," Raju said. A lot of the change in eye care in India has been spearheaded by the American Academy of Ophthalmology, which is "an incredible teaching institution."

During his week with Raju, Pal had the chance to observe an eye surgery in the operating room and see how patients are treated in the clinical setting. The two doctors also had the chance to discuss a project on Amniotic Membrane Transplantation for the treatment of eye disorders.

"I've mostly been observing Raju and the way things are done over here," Pal said. He arrived in Morgantown on Oct. 29 and left on Nov. 6 for the AAO annual meeting.

The two things that stood out the most to Pal during his visit was how doctors interact with patients and the quality control procedures

care of blindness and visual problems in children. "I have always felt that the world is becoming smaller," Raju said, as to why he participates in the visiting ophthalmologists program. "However, I feel the best health care in the world is still here in the United States, only if we can appreciate it.

"People come from all over the world to attend the AAO's annual meeting," he said. "The American Academy is committed to teaching and the transfer of knowledge."

"Americans are not hated in other countries," Raju said. "People in other countries imitate Americans," he said.

"During the last 15 years, India

and the quality of procedures that are in place.

"The individual attention to the patients is a very high priority here," Pal said. "That is very important to the patients, and they really appreciate it.

"That individual attention is lacking in India," he said. "The main problem is the doctor to patient ratio. The number of patients per doctor is much higher in India, which makes it difficult to give individual attention."

However, efforts are under way to change that, Raju said. New medical schools are being built in India in hopes of increasing the number of ophthalmologists available.