**EYE BANK for RESTORING SIGHT, NIGERIA**

The gift of sight is perhaps the most vital of the five senses that human beings are endowed with. Every one of us should therefore appreciate this ability that dictates almost all our responses and actions.

The Eye Bank Established as a joint project of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria and the Federal Nigeria Society for the Blind and backed by decree No 23 of 5th May 1973 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, **THE EYE BANK for RESTORING SIGHT, NIGERIA,** is established to harvest, collect, process and distribute donor eye tissue for sight-saving cornea transplants, medical education and research into causes and treatment for other eye diseases. These services will be rendered to members of the Nigerian public who may by accident or organic degeneration or infection of the cornea have lost the use of their eyes due to cornea opacity (whitish cornea). Cornea blindness is a reversible form of blindness. Unfortunately, babies and children are more prone to this condition as a result of complications from Measles (Measles Keratopathy).

Some Nigerians have benefited from this procedure. On August 29th 2006, a young man, Emmanuel, who had been blind for 25 years (due to measles keratopathy), regained his sight when he had a cornea graft. This was done by “Project Orbis” the Flying Eye Hospital, in Ilorin. The young man was identified by the visiting Ophthalmologist to the Vocational Training Centre for the Blind, Oshodi where he was a trainee as one who can benefit from cornea graft. Today he is a very happy person, married with two children.

On September 18th and 19th 2008, seven young Nigerians between the ages of 2 years and 24 years old had cornea transplants at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital. The corneas were obtained from the Indian Red Cross Eye Bank in collaboration with the Lions Club of Sabarmati, Ahmedabad, India.

To date, the bank has facilitated over 95 cornea transplants including 19 children between the ages of 30 months and 18 years old. However, there are still over 200 patients on our waiting list who require cornea grafts.

In August 2010, the bank harvested the 1st set of corneas from a Nigerian donor who had pledged to donate his corneas before his death. The 2nd harvested cornea was from a Nigerian in September 2012. The harvested corneas had been grafted on recipients.

Organ donation is a relatively new concept in Nigeria and to make an impact a lot of advocacy is needed, the Eye Bank has visited different churches and clubs to raise awareness about corneal donation and Eye Banking also utilizing the print and electronic media, radio network, and printing of handbills and posters. As a non-profit organization, the bank was established and equipped from funds received from individuals and corporate organizations during the 75th birthday anniversary lecture of Chief (Dr.) Akinsete. The bank has not received any subvention from any government except the accommodation provided by the Lagos State Government within the Eye Institute Complex at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, Ikeja. We have depended so far on the generosity of individuals and corporate bodies.

In February 2023, the Eye Bank received a cheque presentation of =N= 1,450,000 (One Million four hundred and fifty thousand naira) from Jagal Foundation to sponsor the corneal transplant of one of our numerous patients on the waiting list to further aid our ‘SEEING IS BELIEVING’ advocacy campaign.

Letters had been written to the Corps Marshal of the Federal Road Safety Corps, Mr. Boboye to explore the possibility of including being a cornea/eye/organ donor on the Nigerian National Drivers’ License. This had been followed up with visits to the Lagos State Commander, and so far this had not been implemented as the Eye Bank recently received a reply from the Corps Marshal stating that the issue raised is beyond the FRSC core mandates

The Eye Bank participated in the 48th Annual General Meeting and 47th Scientific Conference of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria (OSN) which was held at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Ikeja from Wednesday 30th August to September 1st, 2023. The Theme and Sub-theme of the conference were Improving Access to Quality Eye Care and Corneal Donation & Eye Banking respectively. The Eye Bank had a booth provided gratis as the Eye Bank is a part of the OSN. Many delegates visited the Eye Bank stand asking questions. Posters, fliers, and car stickers were in the pack given to everyone who visited the booth. The promotional video clips and fliers used at the opening ceremony were produced by CMC Connect LLP gratis as well. There was also an audio clip by the Eye Bank’s Brand Ambassador, Mrs Dakore Akande. The Lagos State First Lady, Dr. Mrs. Ibironke Sanwo-Olu who was the Special Guest at the Opening Ceremony, visited our stand at the exhibition arena and collected the promotional materials. Some members of the Board of Governors held an online courtesy meeting with her afterward.

Presently, the Eye Bank has drafted and sent a proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding between the Eye Bank and the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital where the Eye Bank is located to further enhance the work of the Eye Bank in and outside the teaching hospital.

For now, the bank has continued to procure/ obtain corneas from abroad to facilitate cornea grafts in different Eye Hospitals in Nigeria, so that the generality of Nigerians can see and be convinced that people with cornea blindness can regain their sight through cornea grafts, “Seeing IS BELIEVING”. Cornea graft surgery has an almost 98% success rate and the fear of rejection is very minimal. With this, it will then make it easier to convince people to donate their corneas at death, so that even at death they will still be relevant as they would then have given a gift that goes on living, “THE PRECIOUS GIFT OF SIGHT”.