



## Karen Sparrow Scholarship

In December 2019, The Peek Vision Foundation Trustees established a three year scholarship which has now provided scholarships for 70 eye health staff from Low or Middle Income Countries to attend the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) short course on Global Eye Health.

In 2022 the Trustees announced they would like to extend the scholarship in Karen's name and in line with all that she represented for a further three years. The Karen Sparrow scholarship will run from 2023 with a budget of £5,000 per annum.

It will be open to one optometrist from a Low or Middle Income Country wishing to pursue public eye health, to attend the Global Eye Health short course in person, or if online, it would be open to all cadres, including optometrists, up to the £5,000.

### The purpose

To invest in potential global eye health leaders and to provide them with career changing opportunities by providing scholarships to attend the LSHTM short course on Global Eye Health.

To illustrate the impact that receiving a scholarship can have we are sharing Dr Okolo's story. She was one of the first scholars who attended the course in July 2020 and went on to receive a full scholarship from LSHTM to attend the MSc in Public Health for Eye Care which she completed in June 2022. Dr Okolo Oteri Eme is the National Coordinator of the National Eye Health programme in Nigeria.



'My role (National Coordinator - National Eye Health programme) had been vacant for some years prior to when I was moved there. And by the time I occupied it, I quickly realised there was a lot of work to do because it had been vacant. It became quickly apparent that the knowledge I acquired in Public Eye Health as part of my residency training would be inadequate to be effective in this new role.

I realised there was this knowledge and skill gap that I needed to fill, so I immediately set out to find out ways to bridge these. I also realised that at that point in time, it would not be possible for me to leave my role for an extended period. So I was quite excited when I found out about the short Global Eye Health course which could be completed remotely, and about the Peter Ackland Scholarship. I applied for the course and the scholarship and was very happy that I was granted the scholarship.

The lectures were also simple, relatable, context-specific, and very solution-oriented, which was something I needed at that point in time. It granted an opportunity for interaction between all the participants, because there were practical sessions, even though it was online. It also created an opportunity for a cross-fertilisation of ideas between the students. It helped us build networks and enduring relationships that of course still exist today. Although it was online, it delivered quite a lot of value for me, which I still leverage upon.

Before I came into my role, there was no budget for eye care but after some time, a budget line was approved. The lessons I learned helped me develop an annual operating plan for eye care for Nigeria which fed into the budget and is still in use to tackle Nigeria's priority eye care problems. This has also helped me build a template that is expandable to accommodate other problems or evolving problems as funding increases. My hope is that funding from the government and from partners continue to increase for eye care in Nigeria.

The experience also helped me to develop my team at the National Eye Health Program and enabled us to start the process of planning and developing the next strategic health plan for Nigeria, for the next 5 years.



The technical skills learned from participating in the course gave us the opportunity to provide an online workshop that helped us to develop the guidelines to deliver safe eye health services during Covid.

There's something that the short course does for you - it gives you knowledge, but it also opens a window to possibilities that could be achieved if you can leverage what you have already learned and then learn more. So that gave me an opportunity to realise that public eye care is wide and that if I were to be effective in my role, I needed to know much more.

The (MSc) training for me this past year was not just about gaining skills and competence, it was a process, a journey bringing me to a place where, of course, I am standing on the shoulders of so many great people who have done a lot of work in eye care, a process of being. So it's been a very rewarding experience and something that has changed my life forever.

For me, it's been a journey, it's been growth. It's given me confidence, it has increased my confidence in public eye care, and it has also increased my network in the public eye health space.

The training of one person or giving one person an opportunity, a scholarship, opens doors for so many more other people, because it's not about taking the knowledge for yourself alone. It's something you share and ensure that people around you and your country hopefully benefit from the knowledge you have gained."



Dr Okolo (bottom middle), in her role as National Eye Health Coordinator during a World Sight Day celebration at the Nigerian National Assembly.



Dr Okolo (front middle), with her LSHTM Masters cohort and Andrew Bastawrous.

## Global Impact

Since the scholarship began students from 27 countries have participated. Below are quotes from a recent evaluation of short course scholars - 2021 cohort.

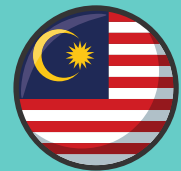


'Although conducting a RAAB survey was not in my budget, I have planned for a traditional cataract prevalence survey in a district using a multi-stage sampling approach. Once completed other eye care organisations working in the district and region will benefit by knowing the current prevalence and plan accordingly.'

**Eye Care Manager, India**

'We were previously hesitant to do eye screenings because we lacked the necessary personnel, equipment, budget, and experience. However, I learned from this training that if we correctly structure the programme, we can do this.'

**Optometrist, Malaysia**



"I had the opportunity to learn how to plan and promote school and community outreach programmes. Shortly after the course, my facility organised a health outreach programme for the community in which eye health was included. I employed some of the skills and principles learnt and the outcome was awesome.'

**Optometrist, Ghana**



'Attending the course has helped me to plan better focusing resources on the most important interventions. It has helped me personally to improve my surgical outcomes through closer monitoring of my outcomes.'

**Ophthalmologist, Nigeria**



'I was able to apply the things I learned in an ongoing HR study in the country with the assistance of our National Ophthalmology Society.'

**Ophthalmologist, Philippines**

