



## Coastal Doctors Reach Out in Humanitarian Service

*In this issue of InSight, you will read about the ways in which Coastal Eye Specialists' doctors — Lee Wan, M.D., Meiya Liao, O.D. and Ruth Marquez, O.D. — are volunteering their expertise in service to the neediest and most vulnerable among us. Our coverage includes the story of a Wan family tradition; first-person reporting by Lisha Wan, Dr. Wan's daughter; and an article highlighting the Coastal Eye optometrists' quest to preserve vision among a local population.*

### A Tradition Passes to the Next Generation

When China opened up to the West in the 1970s, the late P. C. Wan, M.D., founder of Coastal Eye Specialists, began leading humanitarian delegations of physicians to that distant nation under the auspices of the World Eye Foundation. He and other American ophthalmologists performed surgery for the needy, and introduced Chinese ophthalmologists to modern surgical techniques.

In the 1980's, Dr. Lee Wan, fresh out of medical school, accompanied his father on one of these journeys. Father taught son by example. A family tradition had begun.

That tradition passed to yet another generation this summer when Dr. Lee Wan, now Coastal Eye's Medical Director, traveled to Vietnam on a surgical mission trip accompanied by his daughter, Lisha, and his nephew, Kyle. These young people also were touched by the plight of the needy and inspired toward serving others, just as Dr. Wan was by his father a quarter-century before.

Dr. Wan's journey to Vietnam this summer was under auspices of Surgical Eye Expeditions (SEE) International. Based in Santa Barbara, the organization enlists ophthal-

mologists from around the U.S. to volunteer their time and expertise to provide free eye care to the poor in developing countries across the globe — in Asia, Africa, Central and South America and elsewhere; as well as in parts of the U.S. The volunteers pay their own travel expenses, and surgical supplies and lenses are donated by companies such as Alcon, a large ophthalmic supplier. Because cataracts, a readily correctable condition in the U.S., are the leading cause of blindness worldwide, cataract surgery is often the focus of these missions.



*Dr. Wan performing surgery at Trung Vuong Emergency Hospital.*

When SEE International invited Dr. Wan to volunteer, the idea appealed to him because of his interest and expertise in cataract surgery, and the opportunity to offer this expertise to help those who might not otherwise get access to this type of care.

In Vietnam, as in many other developing countries, the technology to perform state-of-the-art, small incision cataract surgery is often inaccessible. So the surgery is

*(continued inside)*

# 'A Life-changing Experience for Me'

By Lisha Wan

This summer I had the incredible opportunity to go to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, with my father, Dr. Lee Wan, to help in an eye surgery mission trip. Our goal was to give those who had very limited access to health care the chance to see again, some after being blind for years.

After 24 hours of travel, we arrived in Vietnam, which was hotter and more humid than anything fathomable in Southern California. It was like another world. I was curious to see how two days of surgery were going to go in such an extreme, challenging environment.

We arrived at the hospital at 8 the next morning and there were already patients lined up, overflowing the exam rooms into the hallways, ready and waiting for surgery. Despite the heat and overcrowding, there was somehow a feeling of hope and optimism in the air.

These patients had traveled four hours by bus in the middle of the night from the countryside to the city. Even though they knew they were going to have to spend the whole day and night waiting and sleeping on a dirty, crowded hospital floor, they were grateful and happy to be there.

Blindness, caused mainly by cataracts, had devastated the lives of these men and women. The men had become dependents because they were no longer able to work and provide for their families. The women were no longer able to take care of the children and grandchildren or keep up their homes.




Lisha Wan

Many of these patients believed that they could never be cured and were trying to adjust to a new life without sight. Having the opportunity to come to this free clinic and get their vision back was so life-changing for them that they were grateful for our help, no matter what difficulties they had to endure getting the surgery.

While the doctors performed surgeries back to back, I got to help, bringing them the surgical equipment, applying medications, and bandaging up the patients when they were done. This made me feel like I was helping to better the lives of all these people, even though I wasn't the one do-

ing the surgeries. Because they were so eager for help, the patients were extremely thankful and cooperative — making the process go by quickly and smoothly. When we saw the patients the next day, they were all shaking our hands and smiling as if they'd never been happier.

Many of us in America take our vision — and eye care — for granted. I was struck by how the people in Vietnam willingly and patiently underwent great hardships to get treatment. Their eyesight was that valuable and important to them, and getting it back changed their lives.

The experience was life-changing for me, too. But what made it even more special and memorable was working with my Dad to help give sight to those who needed it. 

## A FAMILY TRADITION (continued from front page)

usually done much like it was in the U.S. 30-plus years ago: by opening up the eye with a larger incision, taking the cataract out in a big piece, and putting in a larger rigid lens implant. "That's how we first learned to do cataract surgery when I was in training," recalls Dr. Wan. "While I was eager to be able to offer my services to these patients, I also thought it would be good for me to be able go and use skills and techniques that I don't use very often here, in a different, challenging setting."

And challenging it was. At Trung Vuong Emergency Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City, Dr. Wan and three other

surgeons operated side-by-side in a large OR. There were four OR tables, with just enough space between them to move the patients in and out.

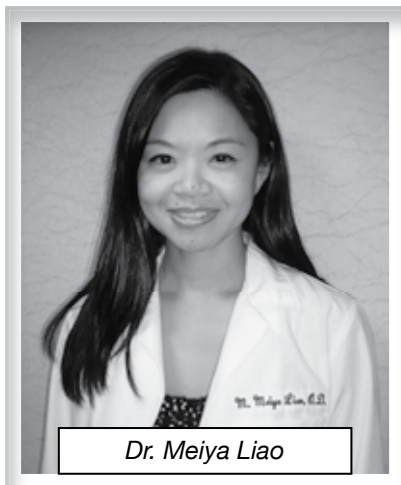
The air conditioning system was not working, and the high-90s heat and humidity were stifling. Complicating that, Dr. Wan had the table right next to the equipment sterilizer, which billowed hot steam. Drenched in perspiration, the four surgeons worked as quickly and efficiently as they could. In two days, over 100 patients underwent sight-restoring surgery. The patients were ecstatic. The doctors were exhausted.

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## Coastal Eye Optometrists Give so that Needy May See

Drs. Meiya Liao and Ruth Marquez, Coastal Eye optometrists, have regularly volunteered their time and expertise to help preserve the eyesight of those who might not otherwise receive critically-needed eye care.

Both doctors work at the St. John's Regional Medical Center Diabetic Clinic, alternating bi-monthly in the clinic that serves diabetics with limited incomes and no health insurance. Dr. Liao has served at the clinic for the past six years; Dr. Marquez since she joined the Coastal Eye staff a year ago.



*Dr. Meiya Liao*

The Diabetic Clinic is premised on the old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The clinic offers patient education as well as screening and referral services for diabetes and associated complications.

Regular eye screening exams are particularly important because diabetics are at risk for developing diabetic retinopathy, a leading cause of blindness in American adults. Each diabetic eye screening consists of vision testing and a dilated exam to evaluate the health of the retina. When Drs. Liao or Marquez find patients who need treatment for retinopathy, they refer them to local retinal specialists who also volunteer their services.

"It's important to me to be able to offer my skills to help those who would have no other access to health-care," says Dr. Liao. "It's so satisfying to catch a disease and be able to initiate treatment in its early stages as opposed to seeing it in the late stages when very little can be done. Most rewarding to me is being able to give back to my community, being able to play a role in helping restore and maintain sight."

Dr. Liao's most memorable experiences with the clinic involve seeing patients back after they've been referred out for surgery and seeing the incredible im-


provement in their vision. "One woman in particular at first could not see any letters on the vision chart, nor could she count the number of fingers that were held up in front of her face," Dr. Liao recalls. "After she had healed from surgery and returned for her annual visit, she said she was so happy to be able to thank us again in person and actually see the faces of the doctors who had helped her."

Dr. Marquez has memorable experiences of her own, not only at the St. John's Diabetic Clinic, but also on the humanitarian eye care journeys she has taken to rural Mexico. On these missions, she and her colleagues served indigent patients who could not afford eye exams, and whose access to eye doctors was very limited. Most had never had an eye exam before. Crowds of them waited in line for hours for help.

Dr. Marquez remembers an elderly woman who thought she had lost

all of her near vision. Her family said she had fallen into a depression because she could no longer see to cook or sew or knit. "At first I thought she had a really bad cataract, but when I refracted her, she had pretty good vision," recalls Dr. Marquez.

"It turned out she just needed reading glasses. The next day, she came back to our site and brought everyone scarves she had knitted all night long. She was so happy and grateful. It made me realize that we had truly changed her life."

Dr. Marquez says humanitarian care for the poor affects the giver as much as the recipient. "Volunteering makes me appreciate everything I have, and sometimes take for granted. Being able to give someone the gift of sight is the most rewarding of all for me." 



*Dr. Ruth Marquez*

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## A FAMILY TRADITION (continued from inside)

So were Lisha, Kyle and Michelle, a medical student volunteer. "The three kids were back and forth all day, opening supplies, moving patients, applying drops and patches, and handling the paperwork," recalls Dr. Wan. "As soon as one patient was finished, one would put drops in the eye; one would put on the eye patch; and one would put on the tape, then walk the patient out and get the next patient in. By then, one of the other surgeons was done and they had to do it all again. The kids hardly had a chance to sit down."

After the two days of nonstop surgery, the visiting doctors were given a tour of the Mekong Delta by the host doctors, and spent another day lecturing and teaching the Vietnamese ophthalmologists on recent advances in cataract surgery.

Dr. Wan was impressed with the local Vietnamese ophthalmologists and their skills, and says they were great hosts. "The problem is that the local doctors are overwhelmed. There are not enough of them trained in cataract surgery. And they don't have access to the equipment and supplies that we have here in the U.S."

SEE helps with equipment and supplies by collecting donations here in the U.S. from various ophthalmic surgical supply companies. Dr. Wan took seven boxes of supplies and lenses with him when he traveled to Vietnam. "I have to give a lot of credit to SEE," he says. "They did an excellent job of getting everything set up and coordinating with the local doctors."



*Dr. Wan with grateful patients.*

The entire experience was unforgettable for him. "We had a lot of patients who were really blind from their cataracts," he recalls. "They couldn't see their food or navigate around their house. It was very rewarding to see how grateful they were for the gift of sight that we could give them."

"Just seeing what these patients went through to get their eyes taken care of was really touching. And then seeing the happiness and joy on their faces afterwards was

what made it all worthwhile."

*Editor's Note: For more information about SEE International and how you can join Dr. Wan in the struggle against curable blindness worldwide, please visit [www.seeintl.org](http://www.seeintl.org). Working together, we can restore sight and transform lives!*



*Notice: Coastal Eye Specialists distributes this newsletter to educate our patients about eye health and care, and the services we provide. It is normally mailed to patients who have had a recent appointment in our office. If you wish to be added to or removed from our mailing list, or receive a copy of our Notice of Privacy Practices, please call (805) 983-0700 or send an e-mail to [info@coastaleye.net](mailto:info@coastaleye.net).*