

# A Case Study on Aravind Eye Care Systems

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“Many people suffered blindness needlessly in our country because they did not even know about a procedure as basic as a cataract operation,” shared Dr. Rani Geetha Priyadarshini, Associate Professor (OB and HR) at the Amrita School of Business, Coimbatore.

“This fact led to the founding of the Aravind Eye Care Systems (AECS) in 1976 when Govindappa Venkatawamy retired as the Head of Ophthalmology from a medical college in Madurai and decided to find a solution to the problem.”



Today, Venkatawamy is no more but AECS flourishes; it has a significant presence in South India. Its chain of hospitals and centers serve many urban, rural and remote areas. There is a medical equipment factory and a training institute.

The organization operates with a unique service-oriented model. Free treatment and care is made available to those who cannot pay. For all the rest, affordable eye care services are provided. Cataract surgeries form 70% of all operations.

In 2008-2009 (most recent years for which figures are available), over 1,50,000 people availed of the free services at AECS. An equal number paid for their services at very modest rates.



The organization follows unique HR practices also. It trains mid-level ophthalmic personnel, mostly women from villages, who are trained in a two-year course. These women never had the chance to go to college, now they get the opportunity to enter the work stream as mid-tier technicians.

“The HR policies practiced here have been AECS’s trump card,” affirmed Dr. Priyadarshini.

Recently a case study on AECS titled [Eye Care for All](#) authored by Dr. Priyadarshini was published by Society for Human Resources Management in India.



In the case, Dr. Priyadarshini elaborated on the unique HR model of the eye care provider that has seen such substantial expansion in a few decades.

“Integration of facilities and support systems ensure that a surgeon here can perform 2,000 surgeries per year against the global average of around 500,” she noted. “Surgeons perform six to eight operations per hour on an assembly line basis with the support of internally-trained mid-level ophthalmic personnel.”

“AECS has well-evolved inhouse training operations. Currently, it runs programs to develop ophthalmologists, paramedics, eye care managers and support service personnel. It was accredited to offer diplomas in ophthalmology in 1982, and subsequently recognized to offer MS in ophthalmology in 1986. Since 1988, it has also been offering fellowship programs in various disciplines of eye care.”



“While structured training programs have kept up a steady supply of new personnel, continuous education has helped existing workers widen their skills. There is a low rate of attrition. Not only that, there is a sizeable waiting list of applicants.”

“AECS recruits without commercial media advertisements. It advertises its personnel needs through announcements during camps and referrals through employees. Currently, 338 medical officers and consultants, 1,313 mid-level ophthalmic personnel and 496 administrative staff are on AECS’s rolls.”



“On joining the work stream, each employee quickly realizes the importance of the founder’s values. This breeds a spirit of involvement and accountability. It goes a long way toward building up a fierce brand loyalty. Effective compensation systems and welfare measures back up the high moral ground and help retain employees.”

“Overall, it is clear that the hospital’s self-sustaining and organic HR template draws and retains the best medical talent.”