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Mark Silverberg, M.D., (FEL'00), FAAP, FAAO is a pediatric ophthalmology specialist at Sansum Clinic in Santa Barbara. He is a Surgical Eye Expedition (SEE) International affiliate who volunteers at local vision programs for veterans, underrepresented communities and children with medical needs. Dr. Silverberg has been on medical expeditions to LV Prasad Eye Hospital in Hyderabad, India, Kikuyu Eye Hospital in Kenya and De Nang Eye Hospital in Vietnam.

In 2002, I traveled to De Nang, Vietnam with Surgical Eye Expeditions (SEE) International. I was joined by my father, Harvey Silverberg, M.D., also an ophthalmologist. It was an amazing experience on many levels. First, to be able to travel to another country and perform eye surgeries alongside my father was a genuine treat.

Second, I was apprehensive about our reception in a country that, only a few decades earlier, had been our nemesis. My apprehension was instantly alleviated by our gracious Vietnamese hosts and by the warmth of our patients. They were incredibly thirsty to share our knowledge and technology. In particular, they had limited exposure to strabismus surgery, so they were incredibly excited to see the Apt clamp, a spring-loaded eye muscle clamp developed by the late Leonard Apt, M.D. of Jules Stein Eye Institute. As a parting gift, I left a clamp for them to keep. The surgeons were thrilled.



Mark Silverberg, M.D. examines a baby at De Nang Eye Hospital in Vietnam. Photo courtesy of Mark Silverberg, M.D.

Third, I was very impressed with the Vietnamese surgeons. Their clinical volume was extraordinary. In the one week we were there, we saw profound pathology, including dozens of mature cataracts, advanced strabismus, and a case of bilateral retinoblastoma. The Vietnamese surgeons were quite skilled, and all the more so given their limited resources. For example, I was amazed at their precision while performing

a suture-free extra capsular cataract extraction. Truthfully, it was humbling to see how our Vietnamese hosts were able to achieve outstanding results with such minimal equipment.

One of the most memorable moments was being in the middle of a complex strabismus case when the power went out. The whole operating room was pitch black. The Vietnamese nurses calmly explained this was a regular occurrence. We finished the case under the dim illumination of a handheld 99-cent flashlight and the patient did great.

Since returning from Vietnam, I have immersed myself in the Santa Barbara Vision Care Program, a SEE program. Ironically, I realized that one does not have to travel across the globe to see impoverished populations with advanced pathology. Here in Santa Barbara, I see dozens of children with amblyopia and strabismus. Through the generosity of local organizations, including Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital and Santa Barbara Eyeglass Factory, I am able to treat these children who would otherwise lose their vision.

For more information about SEE, visit seeintl.org.