

Ophthalmology- through the eyes of a child

Profile: The Ratner Children's Eye Centre



David B. Granet

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AS you approach the Anne and Abraham Ratner Children's Eye Centre, a colourful mural of children's drawings greets you with the words, 'through the eyes of a child'. Once inside, there is no doubt that this unique clinical setting is first and foremost a welcoming place for children.

Adjacent to the Shiley Eye Centre at the University of California, San Diego, the Ratner clinic offers comprehensive paediatric eye care services that include the diagnosis and treatment of strabismus, amblyopia, cataract, genetic disorders, retinopathy of prematurity, and glaucoma. The clinic, now in its tenth year, also provides routine eye examinations and evaluates reading and learning disabilities.

"A lot of our success is because we are able to be a small centre, drawing on Shiley's world-class physicians, its resources, and the largely collaborative approach to the treatment of eye disease," notes David B. Granet MD, FACS, FAAP, director of the Ratner Centre.

Dr Granet leads a team that includes paediatric ophthalmologist Shira Robbins MD, two international paediatric ophthalmology fellows, Cintia Gomi MD from Brazil and Fay Cruz MD from the Philippines and certified orthoptist, Erika Castro. The team also includes a changing array of ophthalmology surgical residents and medical students.



The team is complemented by the faculty at the Shiley Centre, only a few steps away across a sunny courtyard.

"Each child seen here has access to all of the best ophthalmologists within their sub-specialties of retina, cornea, and neuro-ophthalmology. We are geared to make people know that we care and that we want, as much as possible, to help these kids. I want my patients and their parents to know that we are doing everything we know to help them," Dr Granet emphasised.

A kid-friendly environment

Visitors of all ages quickly realise that this is not the usual medical office. An architecturally striking entry way allows light from the California sun into a brightly painted room full of comfortable furniture, a huge aquarium, toys and video games. The child friendly philosophy continues in the exam rooms, which are especially designed to allow evaluation of children of any age in a friendly environment.

Dr Granet was recruited specifically to help design the Ratner Eye Centre and direct its development and growth, both in the clinical treatment of paediatric eye disease and academic research. This is in keeping with the overall philosophy of the Shiley Centre, which encourages a blend of clinical work and innovative research.

The Ratner Eye Centre is part of the Paediatric Eye Disease Investigators Group (PEDIG), a U.S. multicentre network committed to studying paediatric diseases of the eye, such as amblyopia and the basic treatment options.

The Centre has also taken part in several U.S. National Eye Institute paediatric ophthalmology research projects. The Centre will participate in an upcoming, multi-centre convergence insufficiency clinical study. The goal of the study is to evaluate treatment options, comparing office space vision therapy with home-based eye exercises.

As the ophthalmology

consultant for the public school system in San Diego, Dr Granet sees firsthand how important it is to screen preschoolers for subtle eye disease, such as amblyopia.

"Often, these conditions are missed by the paediatrician's routine exam. It is the basics that need to be checked before a "learning disability" label is assigned to a child's problem."

He was the first to report a higher incidence of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children with convergence insufficiency. The symptoms of these conditions can overlap and can interfere with reading and learning. Outside of ophthalmology circles, convergence insufficiency is not understood and often, if a child cannot concentrate, it is assumed that the diagnosis is ADHD.

According to Granet, as many as ten percent of children with learning difficulties may have a vision problem and 15% of those with diagnosed ADHD may have convergence insufficiency.

"Giving a child glasses is more

than seeing better; it can make the difference in how they interact with the world," he said.

Teamwork

In addition to being the director of the Center, Dr Granet provides expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of eye alignment and ocular motility disorders. His clinical interests also include genetic and craniofacial disorders

The newest faculty member, Dr Robbins compares the originality and innovation at the Ratner Centre to "Paris in the '20s." She offers expertise in retinopathy of prematurity, genetic ocular disorders, paediatric cataracts including intraocular lens placement/management, strabismus, amblyopia and paediatric glaucoma.

Certified Orthoptist Erika Castro is another vital member of the team. She was recruited to work with Dr Granet three years ago after completing her two-year certification in orthoptics.

"My multi-functional role as an orthoptist focuses on the



evaluation and treatment of visual system problems, decreased vision, and eye mobility disorders,” she explains.

Her engaging manner helps her to establish a quick rapport, as she interacts with a child and

his/her parents to obtain the child’s cooperation. Her daily challenge is to obtain the child’s medical history and simultaneously carry out the vision screening and eye alignment testing, all within an allotted time

of ten minutes.

She provides an overview of the clinic visit process to both parent and child and introduces them to the other medical staff that they will meet prior to talking with Drs Granet and Robbins.

“It is not uncommon for a child to see ten different practitioners as part of his/her evaluation. It can be a little intimidating,” she notes.

She also acts as a mentor for first-time residents and medical students, as they carry out their exam in preparation for the final step- presenting the child’s case to Dr Granet for his evaluation and definitive diagnosis.

She assists Drs Granet and Robbins in their specialty clinics and conducts her own daily orthoptic clinic, teaching and evaluating both children and adult patients. Once a month, she

assists Dr Granet with an adult strabismus clinic at the nearby Veterans Hospital and evaluates patients at the UC San Diego Medical Centre.

She enjoys the academic stimulation of attending Grand Rounds and presenting orthoptic workshops at national ophthalmology conferences.

“Academics isn’t for all orthoptists; I think you to have the passion to be always challenged,” she says. She appreciates that Dr Granet supports and values orthoptists’ contributions in the field of paediatric ophthalmology. He is part of the 20-member American Orthoptic Council (AOC) that is responsible for setting and monitoring standards for the education of orthoptists, as well as increasing the number of U.S. training programs.

“There are many professionally satisfying aspects of our practice

at the Ratner Eye Centre. But at the end of a long, tiring day, there is nothing like a big hug from a kid when you have made a difference in their life,” Dr Granet told *EuroTimes*.

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