New careers in sight

The Elite School of Optometry of Sankara Nethralaya offers undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programmes in optometry in collaboration with BITS Pilani. An optometrist is a primary eye care professional specialising in the examination, diagnosis and treatment of conditions or impairment of visual system.

“People studying under Tamil medium can also get into it,” says R. Krishnakumar, principal of the school. The degrees are recognised for direct practice in the U.K., Australia and Malaysia, he says. Students with physics, chemistry, mathematics or biology and a score of above 85 per cent in the Class XII board examinations can apply. Only 30 seats are on offer.

N. Anuradha, lecturer and vision screening coordinator, says students get an opportunity to become involved in community activities. They conduct awareness programmes, screen school children for eye problems and are given an opportunity to conduct research based on their work, even at the undergraduate level, she says.

Final-year student Sabarish Srinivasan, who is planning to pursue research in neuroscience, says qualified optometrists can also prescribe eye exercises, contact lenses, low vision aids and specialise in diagnostic techniques. “A certificate [from the ESO] is licence enough to make us eligible to set up a shop,” he adds. Graduates can find jobs in companies manufacturing glasses and contact lenses or assist clinicians as vision care specialists, prescribing glasses, contact lenses, low vision devices and provide therapy for patients requiring non-surgical management of squints.

M.Phil and Ph.D. students study diseases of the eye and develop diagnostic testing tools. Some students are working with children with multiple disabilities. Such children have vision problems, says researcher L.S. Varadarajan. These students work with children to improve their sight and thus enable their day-to-day living, he says.

Even those who opt for small eye institutions offering clinical examination are poised for a lucrative profession, says Jamil Rizwana Hussain, who is hoping to complete her Ph.D. in 2013. She wants to be a teacher in a recognised ophthalmic institute. The degree would fetch offers from institutes providing UGC payscales, she says.

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