

Press Release

[For Immediate Release]

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Amblyopia: The elusive “lazy eye” disorder that can cause blindness without early intervention

In its continued efforts to raise local students' awareness about the importance of eye health and the problem of blindness around the world, Orbis Hong Kong joined forces with AXA Hong Kong to host the “Orbis Blindfold Lunch” at Rosaryhill School on March 16. Over hundreds of primary students donned blindfolds to experience the enormous difficulties faced by the blind in conducting simple tasks, like eating lunch. **Orbis Volunteer Ophthalmologist Dr. Flora Lau**, a guest of honor at the event, warned about the threat of amblyopia amongst children. She urged both students and their parents to seek early diagnosis and treatment in order to avoid permanent vision impairment.

Vital but difficult to detect early symptoms of amblyopia

Commonly known as ‘lazy eye’, amblyopia usually affects just one eye (unilateral amblyopia), but can also affect both eyes (bilateral amblyopia). The condition is caused by inadequate visual stimulation to the brain during a child’s development and can result in partial or even permanent vision loss. Affecting roughly one to four per cent of children worldwide, amblyopia remains a major cause of poor vision among minors.

Here in Hong Kong, statistics from the Student Health Service show that about two to four per cent of children under eight years old suffer from some forms of amblyopia. Most of these cases are unilateral. The most common causes are unequal refraction in the two eyes (anisometropia) and misalignment of the eyes (strabismus). Speaking at the blindfold lunch event, Dr. Lau explained that amblyopia problems are primarily related to the development of the brain’s visual cortex during childhood. What makes unilateral amblyopia especially worrying is that there are no observable symptoms on the affected eye, and people with the disorder can still see properly with their good eye. Therefore, attending visual screening tests is important for early detection of amblyopia.

Catch the ‘golden’ treatment time to avoid permanent vision loss

Early diagnosis and interventions for amblyopia will greatly improve the visual outcome of the children. “There is a critical period for visual development in kids, mostly from birth to eight years old. It is important for kids to perceive clear images during their developmental period, so the visual areas of their brains can be stimulated. Children who are treated after this period will likely suffer from lower vision in the amblyopic eye for the rest of their lives.” Said Dr. Lau.

Dr. Lau emphasized the importance of regular visual screening tests for children in their developmental period to avoid irreversible amblyopia. She also suggested some simple tests to be done at home by parents for their small kids. "Pirate game" -- with each eye alternatively being occluded, parents can compare their own vision with their kids or to observe if there are any abnormal reactions like tilting of head or eye squeezing. If any warning signs are detected, then an ophthalmologist's advice should be sought.

"Given the severity of amblyopia, parents should carefully observe their children's behavior and take them to undergo a comprehensive eye examination every year. 2017 is the sixth year Orbis has organized the Blindfold Lunch event. To date, around 40,000 primary students have taken part in the activity and has raised over HK\$2,400,000 to support visually impaired people around the world. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to AXA Hong Kong for its good corporate citizenship and continued support in spreading the eye care message," said **Ms. Mary Lau, Director of Development for Orbis China and Hong Kong.**

Ms. Andrea Wong, Chief Corporate Responsibility Officer, AXA Hong Kong said, "AXA Hong Kong is committed to raising health awareness amongst the general public, and especially around eye care amongst young students. We are delighted to support this meaningful event for six consecutive years, and are happy to witness that a lot of primary school students have benefited from this event by gaining invaluable eye-care knowledge, and for them to know they are sharing their love and support to visually impaired children in different parts of the world. We hope to arouse more public concern on visual impairment."

In addition to AXA Hong Kong, Orbis also wishes to express its appreciation for media sponsors Sunday Kiss and Yellow Bus, as well as Orbis Volunteer Ophthalmologist Dr. Flora Lau, Sanrio, Rosaryhill School and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Faculty of Business for their support of the event. For full details of Orbis Blindfold Lunch, please visit www.orbis.org/hkblindfold.

Orbis Blindfold Lunch overview

In order to strengthen primary students' awareness of eyes care, Orbis and AXA Hong Kong organize the "Orbis Blindfold Lunch" every year from March to May. Riding on the 15th Anniversary of Cinnamoroll, Orbis cooperates with Sanrio for the first time in this campaign. Bearing a friendly and cute image, Cinnamoroll helps convey the message of importance of eye care through having lunch with eyes blindfolded and seminars. 2017 marks the sixth year of Blindfold Lunch, students will enjoy their lunch with eyes blindfolded to experience the obstacles blind people face and develop a better understanding of World's blindness. Orbis hopes that students will cherish their value of vision more through this event and learn to share the happiness with the needy.

About Orbis International

Orbis is a leading global non-governmental organization that has been a pioneer in the prevention and treatment of blindness for over 30 years. Orbis transforms lives by delivering the skills, resources and knowledge needed to deliver accessible quality eye care. Working in collaboration with local partners including hospitals, universities, government agencies and ministries of health, Orbis provides hands-on ophthalmology training, strengthens healthcare infrastructure and advocates for the prioritization of eye health on public health agendas. Orbis operates the world's only Flying Eye Hospital, a fully accredited ophthalmic teaching hospital on board an MD-10 aircraft. To learn more about Orbis and to get involved, please visit www.orbis.org.

About AXA Hong Kong

AXA Hong Kong, a member of the AXA Group, prides itself of serving over 1 million customers¹ in Hong Kong and Macau. Besides being one of the largest health protection providers in Hong Kong, it is also the number 1 General Insurance provider² and a market leader in motor insurance.

AXA Hong Kong is committed to the on-going development and enhancement of our life & savings, health, property & casualty, wealth management and retirement solutions in order to satisfy the different needs of our individual and corporate customers.

We believe it is our inherent responsibility to support the communities we operate in, hence creating a sustainable business via constant and considerable contribution in the dimensions of health, environment and the community.

1 Including customers of AXA China Region Insurance Company Limited, AXA China Region Insurance Company (Bermuda) Limited (incorporated in Bermuda with limited liability), and AXA General Insurance Hong Kong Limited

2 Based on 2015 Office of the Commissioner of Insurance market share statistics represented by overall gross premiums

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