Preventing Childhood Blindness in Eastern Europe and Russia

Thanks to the generous support of Eye Samaritans International the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) has been able to help doctors and nurses from Russia and the Black Sea countries to identify children at risk of retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) and to help ensure they are screened and treated in time, thus avoiding a life of blindness in many of these infants.

Retinopathy of blindness becomes a problem in countries as the neonatal intensive care of pre term infants improves. Without having clear regulations, essential equipment and well trained staff many babies will be at risk and if left untreated will become blind from ROP. In most Western economies with well developed health systems ROP is no longer a significant problem but we have seen that in the emerging economies of Eastern Europe babies are still going blind from ROP.

With the support of Eye Samaritans international we have been working with Ministries of Health in Russia, Romanian, Bulgaria, Moldova, Georgia, Poland, Ukraine and Turkey to bring together the teams responsible for the care of pre term babies – the neonatal nurses, neonatologists and ophthalmologists.

*First National ROP Symposium – Romania March 2015*
The first step is building a leadership team encompassing all three cadres to drive forward the ROP programme in their country through training, lobbying their Ministry of Health for better equipment, more staff and adequate training and to develop evidence based guidelines for the screening and treatment of ROP in their country.

Our job is to support these leaders with up to date research, experience and expertise from other countries, templates and guidelines for adaptation but perhaps most importantly of all a forum for discussion and for leaders to emerge.

ROP fellowship for Russian Ophthalmologist at the LVPEI Institute, India.

The generosity of Eye Samaritans International and its supporters has enabled us to work with teams across the region and to help improve care of babies, minimise the risk of ROP and to help ensure that those at risk are seen in time and treated. Through this work the numbers of babies going blind from ROP will be reduced through both prevention and timely treatment.