

# press release

*For immediate Release*

## **New eye screening technology to be introduced in public schools**

- *200,000 pupils to be screened in first phase*
- *Teachers to be trained and supplied with smart phones with testing apps*

**Monday 29<sup>th</sup> February 2016...** A new eye examination technology will be deployed in six counties in northern Kenya to help reduce cases of visual impairment among school children. The Portable Eye Examination Kit (PEEK) which has been developed by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine will be used to screen 200,000 pupils in 350 schools in Trans Nzoia County in the next three years.

The upscale of the project funded by Standard Chartered Bank follows successful trials of the use of PEEK, a mobile-based system that uses smartphone technology to carry out various eye tests including visual acuity, colour vision as well as lens and retinal imaging, over the last year in Trans Nzoia.

Speaking during the launch of the kit Dr Hillary Rono, Kitale District Hospital Ophthalmologist said the pilot programme recorded significantly improved adherence to referrals in the 50 schools. “There is a mismatch between the demand of childhood eye services and the human resources to provide them. To bridge the gap, a screening tool delivered by teachers with minimal training will be scaled and used to identify, refer and track children with visual impairment, thus making the referral process more efficient, cost-effective and streamlined maximising specialist care to those who need it,” said Dr Rono. .

The pilot funded through Standard Chartered’s Seeing is Believing CSR programme was aimed at validating the visual project acuity component of PEEK in school-aged children and determining if the teachers trained could use PEEK to identify children with visual impairment and to establish whether the technology improves adherence to referrals.

The second phase of the programme will see Teachers from selected schools trained and supplied smart phones with the appropriate application to assess the visual acuity of children in their schools. Children identified with visual impairment will be referred to Kitale County Hospital Eye Unit for further

assessment. A Cloud-based data system has been developed to record and analyse data as it is being collected in the schools.

“Vision screening can detect latent or early symptomatic stages of a vision condition. If childhood visual impairment is not identified and managed at an early age, this can result in under-achievement at school and possible societal exclusion in later life,” said Dr Rono.

At the completion of the second phase, the project is expected to be rolled out countrywide. Six counties Trans Nzoia, Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet West Pokot and Narok currently covered under the Seeing is Believing programme will be among the early beneficiaries. Currently ophthalmic workers carry out vision screening for children during school screening and outreach programmes. The process requires eye workers to leave the hospital, where they are needed to deliver eye care, and spend large proportions of time in the community or schools for screening.

Speaking during the launch ceremony, Lamin Manjang Standard Chartered Bank CEO lauded the PEEK invention saying it will help deliver the objectives of the Seeing is Believing programme especially in remote regions. “By developing a tracking system for children referrals and strengthening follow-up mechanism, PEEK will be instrumental in developing best practice replicable model for vision screening that is well documented,” he said.

Through the Seeing is Believing programme, the Bank has funded the establishment of eye clinics and provision of essential equipment and infrastructure in Uasin Gishu, Kapenguria, Kapsabet and Iten. Several health care workers have also been trained to identify and refer eye problems as a means of strengthening the eye health referral system to manage eye conditions.

The programme will be implemented through the Kitale County Hospital Eye Unit in conjunction with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Standard Chartered Bank partners Operation Eyesight.

Seeing is Believing is Standard Chartered Bank’s global initiative aimed at tackling avoidable blindness and visual impairment. In Kenya, in partnership with Operation Eyesight and Christian Blind Mission, CBM, the Bank has sponsored cataract, glaucoma and trauma related surgeries for needy children under the age of nine at five hospitals country wide. The initiative has helped restore sight to over 8,000 children.

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