



# VOSH-NECO

Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity/New England Council of Optometrists

Winter/Spring 2007, 2008

## VOSH-ONE (NECO) returns to Armenia

by Linda Bennett, OD, VOSH-NECO trip leader

In late September, 2007, seven optometrists, a fourth year optometry student, a nurse and thirteen volunteers traveled to Armenia for a second VOSH trip. Five clinics were held outside the capital city of Yerevan and a total of 935 patients were seen.

Yerevan has experienced considerable changes in just the past two and a half years. The United States government has built a new embassy there, its second largest in the world.

Construction projects are going on all over the city. There is a positive feeling among the people that things are improving. Yerevan has more of an international appearance with western stores carrying BOSS, Gucci and other name brand products. However, not much has changed in the countryside where our clinics were held. Pensioners are especially hard hit by the economic changes that are occurring.



Dr. Linda Bennett (above) and Dr. Leora Burns (left) with Armenian patients



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## To Armenia a second time

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Our first clinic was held in the town of Tutu Choor (translated as sour water), in the Tchambarak region of Lake Sevan. The mayor of Tutu Choor told us that we were the first doctors to ever come to the village.

Yeghnadzor is the only village where we had held a clinic in 2005. This time our group stayed overnight in Jermuk so that we were only an hour's ride from the village, giving us a full day to see patients and enjoy the hospitality of the villagers. We were treated to a lesson in lavash baking and home grown farm food, a really special treat.

We were fortunate to have a volunteer optician from California join us at the final two clinics. Lussian Kamberian is volunteering her time to work with the Armenia Eye Care Project, an organization that has made a full time commitment to eradicating blindness in Armenia. Our group took time to make a connection with this organization and it will follow up on our referrals.

The trip was sponsored by AMARAS, a US Armenian organization based in Watertown, MA and dedicated to promoting appreciation of the Armenian arts and culture in Armenia and the USA. Reverend Joanne Hartunian again served

as our program manager and was assisted by Peggy Hovanessian. The VOSH team was invited as guest optometrists to the Republic of Armenia; clinic sites were decided in cooperation and consultation with Armenia's Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Armenian Embassy in Washington, DC.

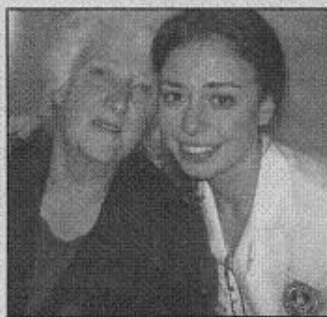
Of the 935 patients who were seen, 46 required referrals, mostly for mature cataracts. Spectacles were given to 894 patients with many requiring two pairs. Well over half needed hyperopic prescription and over 200 myopic prescriptions were dispensed. We filled 121 prescriptions in Armenia using all the funds in the Armenia Eyeglass fund. Only four pairs of glasses had to be made in US upon our return.

A third VOSH trip to Armenia is planned for the fall of 2009. If interested, contact Linda Bennett, OD, at [lbennet-tod@earthlink.net](mailto:lbennet-tod@earthlink.net). Contributions to VOSH-NECO's Armenia Eyeglass Fund can be sent to PO Box 41, Holden MA 01520-0041. Checks should be made payable to VOSH-NECO (ONE) and earmarked for the Armenian Eyeglass Fund.

More photos and the complete text of this report can be read on our VOSH-ONE website, [www.VOSH-ONE.org](http://www.VOSH-ONE.org)

## One memorable patient

by Rita Cherian, fourth-year NECO intern



We were conducting eye exams in the village of Maralyk, in the outskirts of Armenia. Patients were lining up in swarms with documentation and passport in hand. An elderly Armenian woman sat at my station. As I started taking her case history, the woman explained that she was blind from glaucoma and that she had been taking pilocarpine drops. She said her left eye was completely blind and she could see only figures and light with her right eye.

I proceeded with the exam and pulled out my retinoscopy rack and retinoscope. The woman began frantically gesturing that each lens I moved was better than the previous one and then she started crying. She was extremely emotional since she had lost all hope of seeing. Tears streamed down her cheeks and mine as well. Before I even put the trial frame on her face, she was kissing my hands and thanking me. After all was done, she was a -3.00 D myope. I couldn't hold back the tears. We both embraced. I still fill up whenever I recount this story that makes optometry such a worthwhile profession.