



BC ophthalmologist, Dr. Martin Spencer receives Sovereign Medal for Volunteers

Seva Canada Board Member and volunteer heralded for over 30 years of service to restore sight and prevent blindness for people in need in developing countries.

VANCOUVER, BC – April 12, 2016 – With more than 39 million people suffering from blindness, 80 percent of which is preventable or treatable, BC-based ophthalmologist, [Dr. Martin Spencer](#) is being recognized with the Governor General’s Sovereign Medal for Volunteers for his contribution to restoring sight and preventing blindness worldwide. Dr. Spencer has been an active board member of Seva Canada for over 30 years. Seva Canada, an international development organization has restored sight to 4 million people and provided comprehensive eye care services to millions more worldwide since 1982.

Known affectionately as an “eye opener,” Dr. Spencer travels overseas annually, at his own expense, to Seva’s programs in Cambodia, Guatemala, India, Malawi, Madagascar, Nepal, and Tibetan Areas of China and training local eye care specialists in surgical techniques and performing surgeries.

“I think everyone has a desire to help, and I’m fortunate to have an occupation with which I’m able to make a difference in the lives of others. The impact of a \$50, 15-minute cataract surgery on a person in need in the developing world still amazes me to this day. Seeing someone get their sight back and see the faces of their loved ones knowing they will be able to return to work or school and provide for their family is extraordinary. Receiving an award for doing something I get tremendous satisfaction from is truly icing on the cake. I’m happy to bring attention to the work that Seva does to improve the lives of people who aren’t lucky enough to live in a country like Canada.” – Dr. Martin Spencer

Dr. Spencer has restored sight to thousands of people in need over his decades of service. He was one of the first doctors in the world to bring high-quality, inexpensive sight-restoring services to remote rural areas. Dr. Spencer also adapted modern cataract surgical techniques and instruments for geographically challenging environments, such as mobile eye camps in the Himalaya. His innovations have become the global standard.

Dr. Spencer has worked extensively with the renowned Aravind Eye Care System in India, the largest in the world. Aravind created a method of subsidizing free surgeries for the poor by charging reasonable fees to patients who can pay. Aravind, with the help of Seva, also created Aurolab, a not-for-profit manufacturing facility that provides millions of low-cost intraocular lens implants annually for cataract patients, as well as surgical sutures and other sight-saving products.

“Dr. Martin Spencer’s innovative approach to eye care and tireless dedication to helping others has had a tremendous impact in the developing world. He has put British Columbia and Canada on the map with regard to international development and health care, and serves as an example of British Columbia’s innovation and ingenuity making a positive impact worldwide. Seva Canada couldn’t be more proud of his achievements and recognition by the Governor General’s Sovereign Medal for Volunteers” – Penny Lyons, Seva Canada Executive Director

About Seva Canada

[Seva Canada](#) is a Vancouver-based charitable organization whose mission is to restore sight and prevent blindness in the developing world.

Seva believes that giving sight to a blind person is the most effective way to relieve suffering, reduce poverty and transform lives. Seva works with local partners to create sustainable eye care programs that achieve long-term change, are culturally sensitive and reach those most in need – women, children and people living in extreme poverty and isolation.

Seva works in many of the poorest places in the world: Benin, Burundi, Cambodia, Congo-Brazzaville, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Madagascar, Malawi, Nepal, Tanzania, and Tibetan Areas of China.

About the Sovereign Medal for Volunteers

The Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers recognizes the exceptional volunteer achievements of Canadians from across the country and celebrates a wide range of voluntary contributions. It recognizes living Canadians who have made a significant, sustained and unpaid contribution to their community, in Canada or abroad.

As an official honour created by the Crown, the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers will be part of the Canadian Honours System. The program incorporates and replaces the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award, created in 1995, by then-Governor General the Right Honourable Roméo LeBlanc.

The Chancellery of Honours, part of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General, will administer the program.

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