

## Progress

By Steve Mason, Ph.D.

I can remember when I first really became aware of the epidemic of modern day human trafficking. Like many people, I lived in a comfortable world that was occasionally pierced by reports of sweatshops or someone forced into prostitution. The idea of 29.8 million people living everyday as slaves, as was recently estimated by the 2013 Global Slavery Index (<http://www.globalslaveryindex.org/>), never crossed my mind.

Then I heard Rachel Sparks Graesser speak at my church as she was getting The Sold Project off the ground, and I began to realize the massive scale of the problem. The idea of millions of children being exploited sexually was especially nauseating. From there, I learned of other organizations fighting trafficking, read books and articles on trafficking, and joined a Love146 Task Force. Along the way, I also became increasingly aware of the severity of the disparity in healthcare between the developed world and lower income communities, including the needs of trafficked and exploited people. Ultimately, I joined Dave and Juliana with *Cancer InCytes*. My blindness was cured, and it was time to bring light to others in order to help those trapped in darkness.

I don't tell this story to make any claims of greatness or to give myself a vain pat on the back. Rather, I put this forward as just one

story like many other stories, all of them incremental but still significant. Someone decided to make other people aware, and I was one of the people touched by their efforts. Because of that, progress was made in the battle.

Why point this out? The challenge of choosing to be a part of the solution to massive and dark problems like the ones *Cancer InCytes* tackles is that it is easy to miss progress as it happens. But progress is happening. Trafficking is increasingly becoming a part of the public consciousness, as seen by recent plotlines in movies and TV shows such as *Taken*, *The Blacklist*, and *Burn Notice*. Celebrities and athletes are also taking stands and making donations of time and money. Organizations are partnering and influencing policy and laws. On the healthcare side, one of the biggest stories at the 2013 American Society of Clinical Oncology annual conference was the demonstrated benefit of a low-cost and simple method for cervical cancer screening in low-income populations in India [1]. Progress has been made, and we should all be glad for it and recognize it.

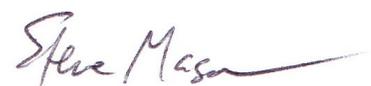
The great part is that progress is mostly made through small steps – one person educating those in his or her proximity. I'll never forget the questions – and looks – I received the first time I wore a Falling Whistle to the lab ([www.fallingwhistles.com](http://www.fallingwhistles.com)). How-

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ever, several of my colleagues heard about children forced to be soldiers that day, most of them hearing about it for the first time. How many of you have similar stories, each one a small step towards freedom, towards improved healthcare, towards meeting the needs of the marginalized in our society?

With all that said, though, the sobering reality is that millions more are still waiting for progress to be made. I hope that in this issue, you'll find something to share with the people in your proximity, allowing you to drive a few small steps of progress of your own.

Sincerely,



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### References

1. Shastri S, Mittra I, Mishra G, Gupta S, Dikshit R, Badwe R: Effect of visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA) screening by primary health workers on cervical cancer mortality: A cluster randomized controlled trial in Mumbai, India. *J Clin Oncol* 2013, 31.