



Professor Dr Prasit Watanapa, dean of Mahidol University's Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital, centre, joins a team of ophthalmologists to announce the three stem-cell treatments at a press conference yesterday.

# Siriraj marks success in new stem-cell therapy for optical disorders

THE NATION

SIRIRAJ HOSPITAL announced yesterday that its treatment for cornea stem-cell deficiency and ocular surface burns via three stem-cell treatments, especially the "simple limbal epithelial transplantation" (SLET), have been a resounding success, with patients recovering quickly. These treatments also offer huge savings on medical expenses.

Siriraj also announced that it would continue research in ophthalmology.

Professor Dr Prasit Watanapa,

dean of Mahidol University's Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital, said the Siriraj team of ophthalmologists had successfully implemented three stem-cell treatments previously.

They were CLET (Cultivated limbal epithelial transplantation) in 2007; COMET (Cultivated oral mucosal epithelial transplantation) in 2008 and SLET in 2014. Now, he said, doctors have three options when treating

patients with optical disorders.

Associate Professor Dr Pinnita Tanthuvanit, head of the Siriraj Department of Ophthalmology's cornea and refractive surgery division and the transplantation team, said Siriraj has developed a special "Siriraj Technique". Under this technique, ophthalmologists will prioritise SLET (using the patient's own stem cells or those of a blood relative) to treat a deficiency in the cornea's

Limbus stem cell before looking at the other two options.

So far, 75 patients have been treated at Siriraj Hospital - with 24 eyes treated using the CLET option and 27 using COMET, she said. Both CLET and COMET were based on cell culture and had a success rate of 70 per cent. The remaining 35 eyes were treated using SLET, which had a success rate of 83 per cent, she added.

Siriraj Department of Ophthalmology head Associate Professor Dr Ngamkae Ruangvaravate said deficiency of Limbus stem cells in corneas was brought on by other complications, such as exposure to dangerous chemicals, the Stevens Johnson Syndrome, cornea inflammation or infection, innate stem-cell deficiency, tumour or severe pterygium (growth of a mucous membrane).