

News Release - World Glaucoma Week 2012

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Glaucoma expected to rise by 33% in coming decade

Regular eye tests the only way to detect Glaucoma early

The level of the eye disease Glaucoma is expected to rise by 33% in Ireland over the coming decade, eye health organisations have warned at the start of World Glaucoma Week.

The message from the Association of Optometrists Ireland, Irish College of Ophthalmologists and NCBI, the national sight loss agency, is that treatment for Glaucoma works very well if detected early and usually involves eye drops alone.

The groups highlighted that glaucoma is essentially symptomless at early stages and the only way to detect it is through regular eye examinations. At a late stage Glaucoma is irreversible and results in sight loss and blindness. More information is at www.eyedoctors.ie.

Association of Optometrists Optometric Advisor Lynda McGivney Nolan said the key message, particularly for older people, is to get tested regularly. "The theme of World Glaucoma Week is 'Don't let Glaucoma Darken your Life'. We are encouraging people to pass on this message and once you are over 50 to get eye tests every two years."

It is estimated that 3% of the older population (over the age 50) has Glaucoma. The symptoms are reduced peripheral (side) vision and at an advanced stage it leads to blindness.

Glaucoma is related to problems with the fluid in the eye and correct pressure to maintain eye health. The test to detect the condition is carried out as part of the routine eye examination given by every Optometrist, or eye specialist. It is quick, non-invasive and gives an immediate result.

To mark World Glaucoma Week in Ireland over 200 Independent optician practices across the country are offering free Glaucoma testing and free advice from March 12th - 17th. Members of the public are being encouraged to check with their local independent participating practice for details.

NCBI Chief Executive Des Kenny encouraged members of the public to avail of this generous offer of free eye-tests for Glaucoma from participating practices. "There are over 1,000 people who are using NCBI's services as a result of having Glaucoma. Last year 115 people were new to NCBI as a result of Glaucoma."

The expected 33% increase in the numbers of over 50s with Glaucoma is linked to the expected increase in the population between 2011 and 2021 as projected by the Central Statistics Office. However, the groups highlighted that the rise is likely to be *higher* than this as the rate of Glaucoma will also increase as more people live longer. Glaucoma is the highest rising cause of preventable blindness in the western world.

Need for Greater Community Based Eye Care

Irish College of Ophthalmologists spokesperson Dr. Aoife Doyle said that the early detection of glaucoma is key to preventing later sight loss.

“We are also highlighting the importance of a community-based approach to glaucoma care and are actively working towards providing this service.”

Dr Doyle underlined the importance of sight tests to detect possible glaucoma so that it can be diagnosed by an eye doctor and treated in the community where possible.

In conclusion Ms Lynda McGivney Nolan said: “If you are diagnosed with Glaucoma, it is essential that you take your medication as prescribed and attend for regular check ups on your eyes.”

Risk factors for Glaucoma include:

Age: 1 in 200 people up to the age of 50 will develop Glaucoma. An estimated 3% of older adults develop Glaucoma, however some studies have estimated that the rate may be closer to 10% among people between the ages of 50 and 80. Studies in Ireland (the Roscommon study) found a rate among older people of 2-3%.

Race: People of African origin are five times more likely to develop Glaucoma and ten times more likely to lose vision more quickly because of the disease.

Family History: If someone in your family has or has had Glaucoma; you are more likely to develop it.

Health: People with health problems such as Diabetes or High Blood Pressure are more likely to develop Glaucoma.

Other risks: Long term steroid use and any surgery or injury to the eye also increases the risk.

Further Information

Ronan Cavanagh, Cavanagh Communications: (086) 317 9731.

Lynda McGivney Nolan, Des Kenny and Dr. Aoife Doyle and are available as spokespeople.

More information online at:

Association of Optometrists Ireland: www.optometrists.ie

Irish College of Ophthalmologists: www.eyedoctors.ie

NCBI: www.ncbi.ie