

GLAUCOMA WATCH

MARCH, 2013

“Ninety percent of Blindness Caused by Poverty in Developing Countries”

World Glaucoma Week is a reminder to every one, that Glaucoma is a major public health concern. Because the disease is a leading cause of permanent blindness among adults in their middle years and older, it poses a significant potential challenge to the well-being of affected individuals, their families' communities and national economies.

If findings from the Barbados Eye Study are extrapolated to the rest of the Caribbean four percent or close to 250,000 persons, in the English speaking Caribbean are living with Glaucoma and at least 11% of persons 60 years or older have Glaucoma. Global estimates suggest that more than 90% of persons, who are blind, live in developing countries. The harsh reality is that poverty and under developed Eye Health Services are among the leading causes of blindness in the Caribbean and around the World.

Because of the pervasiveness of unemployment and under employment, in most Caribbean countries, many who risk losing their sight to Glaucoma, have to make the stark decision to forego a long overdue visit to the Eye Specialist, in order to put food on the table or pay for more immediate social and economic demands.

Furthermore, persons who receive a diagnosis of Glaucoma are often confronted with the life-long challenge of finding the money to pay for visits to the Doctor and purchase Glaucoma medications.

Unless Caribbean Governments make a strategic and fiscal decision to fund the training, recruitment and placement of increased numbers of: Refractionists, Optometrists and Ophthalmologists in the publicly funded Health Sector, members of the region's middle classes, the near poor and the poor, will continue to

lose sight to Glaucoma at an alarming rate.

Presently there are about one Optometrist to more than 150,000 persons living in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB) is committed to helping the Caribbean achieve the United Kingdom's standard of one Optometrist to every 10,000 residents.



ANTIGUA & BARBUDA : Dr Genalin Ang examines a patient at the Fiennes Institute in St John's, Antigua and Barbuda



ST LUCIA : Patient being examined at the Eye Clinic located at St Lucia Blind Welfare Association .



JAMAICA : Joyce Williams - a Glaucoma patient visiting the Eye Clinic at the Mandeville Regional Hospital .

To that end, **CCB** commends the effort of the University of Guyana, the Government of Guyana the St Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the Government of Trinidad & Tobago, for joining our effort to increase the number of Optometrists available to the Caribbean.

Both Universities are currently offering the UK-style Bachelor of Science in Optometry. Additionally, the University of Guyana has been training Refractionists for more than four years. Graduates of the Programme are now working in: Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Jamaica and St. Lucia.

In 2013, the UWI's St. Augustine Campus will be graduating close to fifteen new Optometrists. By 2014, both the UWI and the University of Guyana will be graduating a combined total of close to 35 new Optometrists.

In order to achieve the UK's current standard of one Optometrists to 10,000 residents, the Caribbean needs close to six hundred (600) practicing Optometrists, ten (10) times the current number.

The CCB hopes that several other Universities will begin to offer the Programme over the next two years.

It is only when we have Refractive, Optometry and Ophthalmology Services being more accessible, affordable and available to the poor and near poor, that we will see a significant reduction in the prevalence of blindness from Glaucoma and other conditions which cause blindness in the Region.



World Glaucoma Week is a joint global initiative of the World Glaucoma Association and the World Glaucoma Patients Association to raise awareness of this condition.

In this video produced by the Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB), Dr. Shailendra Sugrim, a Consultant Ophthalmologist and Glaucoma Specialist at the Georgetown Public Hospital shares his knowledge about the prevalence of Glaucoma in Guyana and the wider Caribbean."



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_JC1twMtE4

GLAUCOMA PATIENTS : THEIR STORIES

Khetura Porter's story



Khetura Porter has been battling Glaucoma for several years. She welcomed us into her home in the western Jamaican parish of Westmoreland where she shared with us her story on the fight against Glaucoma.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKplelkz0nY>

“Only Two Eyes”



Mr. O'Brian "Spriggy" Norton got what he calls the shock of his life only a few years ago when he was diagnosed with Glaucoma. Today his passion is that of telling others about the danger of Glaucoma.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CNBb9_BZ5w

Glaucoma myths & facts



Dr Marlene Smith -Day
Consultant Ophthalmologist
Mandeville Regional Hospital,
Jamaica

suffering from **Glaucoma** which is called Juvenile **Glaucoma**. People who inherit **Glaucoma** generally develop it in their early forties. Incidences of **Glaucoma** increases further with advancing age.

MYTH: I have great vision, I don't wear glasses, so I couldn't have **Glaucoma**.

FACT: Most forms of **Glaucoma** have no symptoms or cause no change in vision until late in the course of the disease.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY IF

- You suffer from recurring blurry vision
- You believe your peripheral (side) vision is decreasing
- You see rainbow-hued halos around lights at night
- You experience pain around the eyes after watching tv or leaving a dark room.

MYTH: Smoking Marijuana will cure **Glaucoma**

FACT: Smoking "ganja" will not help those who do not use the prescribed eye drops. They will still go blind. Other problems could develop such as stomach ulcers and lung cancer.

MYTH: If there's no pain, there's no problem.

FACT: The most common form of **Glaucoma** - Open Angle **Glaucoma** initially has no symptoms. The pressure in the eye builds gradually. Without treatment, blindness will occur.

MYTH: Only the elderly get **Glaucoma**

FACT: **Glaucoma** can affect any age group from the new-born to the elderly, though increase in life expectancy is one of the high-risk factors..

It is not uncommon to find children between the ages of four and ten



Dr Smith-Day examines a patient

MYTH : If you have lost your vision due to **Glaucoma** , there's no need for medication.

FACT: You must continue to use the prescribed medication. This will control the pressure within the eye and prevent further damage .

MYTH: **Glaucoma** always leads to blindness

FACT: Nearly 90 per cent of all **Glaucoma**-related blindness can be prevented with proper treatment. The key is timely diagnosis.



Patients at the Eye Clinic located at the Mandeville Regional Hospital - Jamaica

What is Glaucoma



Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that gradually steal sight without warning. In the early stages of the disease, there may be no symptoms. Experts estimate that half of the people affected by Glaucoma may not know they have it.

Vision loss is caused by damage to the optic nerve. This nerve acts like an electric cable with over a million

wires. It is responsible for carrying images from the eye to the brain.

There is no cure for Glaucoma—yet. However, medication or surgery can slow or prevent further vision loss. The appropriate treatment depends upon the type of Glaucoma among other factors. Early detection is vital to stopping the progress of the disease.

It was once thought that high pressure within the eye, also known as intraocular pressure or IOP, is the main cause of this optic nerve damage. Although IOP is clearly a risk factor, it is believed that even people with “normal” levels of pressure can experience vision loss from Glaucoma.

(The Glaucoma Research Foundation)

Main causes of Blindness in the Caribbean

1. Un- Operated Cataracts
2. Uncorrected Refractive Errors and Low Vision
3. Diabetic Retinopathy
4. Glaucoma
5. Childhood Blindness

OUR MISSION, OUR PURPOSE, OUR GOAL....

Our purpose is preventing blindness and visual impairment while restoring sight and creating opportunities for persons whose sight cannot be restored.

How can you help?

Please donate to CCB Eye Care Caribbean.

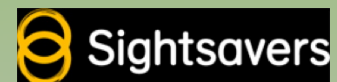
Donations may be made via our website www.eyecarecaribbean.com

Eye On Sight has been produced with the assistance of our partners including:

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