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NASA PURCHASES INVENTION FROM NORTHERN WISCONSIN OPTOMETRIST

Dr. Paul Filar, OD, invents camera to aid astronauts at International Space Station

MADISON, WI-- Optometry reaches new heights this month with an invention by Wisconsin optometrist Dr. Paul Filar. Dr. Filar's invention, an attachment to a modified digital camera that takes pictures and video of the retina and optic nerve, captured the attention of NASA officials earlier this month and ended up onboard the space shuttle Discovery that launched Friday, Aug. 28.

Dr. Filar, named 2008 Young Optometrist of the Year by the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA), invented the camera attachment to benefit long-distance and elderly patients. He needed smaller equipment that could travel easily, and a device that would allow him to properly treat patients who found it uncomfortable to sit for a conventional eye exam.

"The camera allows me to take a quick snapshot or video of the eye and review it or compare it at a later time," said Filar. Dr. Filar also created the camera with hopes it could be used in countries lacking modern eye care technologies. Volunteers in third world nations can use the device to take ocular pictures and send them digitally to a professional who can then assess patients' eye health.

"The camera is meant to be a screening tool," said Dr. Filar. "It enables a professional to examine the front and back of the eye for problems like glaucoma or hemorrhaging."

NASA contacted Filar shortly after they discovered the product through GOOGLE. have since ordered six of Filar's product.

"I knew the device would be useful for rural and elderly patient care, but I never imagined this," said Filar. "It's remarkable."

As construction on the International Space Station winds down, the station will place more emphasis on its serving as a platform for scientific research. The Discovery space shuttle, carrying various scientific instruments on-board, symbolizes the beginning of this shift.

"The device will be stored on the international space station as a medical tool to allow the flight surgeons and research community insight into the potential changes in the eye that may come about as a result of long-duration missions," NASA spokesman Bill Jeffs told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Aug. 26.

Are there more inventions to come?

"I have a filing cabinet full of things I have tried," Filar joked. "There are always projects cooking."

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About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 650 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's Web site at www.woa-eyes.org.