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HYPERTENSION IMPACTS YOUR HEART AND YOUR VISION

Protect your heart, vision and overall health through a comprehensive eye examination by a licensed eye doctor

MADISON, Wis. – Since 1964, February has been recognized as American Heart Month, a national event to remind Americans to focus on their cardiovascular health. What is lesser known is that a comprehensive eye exam can play an important role in detecting heart related conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes, which may also predict a patient's risk of future strokes or heart attacks. In addition, if these conditions are left untreated, they may eventually lead to permanent vision loss.

WOA President and Wausau, WI area optometrist Dr. Chris Marquardt explains, "a comprehensive dilated eye examination has the potential to detect certain heart conditions." As Dr. Marquardt clarifies, "The eye is the only place in the body where blood vessels can be seen without having to look through skin or tissue. As a result, optometrists can detect many diseases that may affect our heart and blood vessels, such as high blood pressure. This knowledge allows patients to seek the appropriate treatment and to potentially increase the longevity of their life."

The longer a cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure, progresses before it is diagnosed, the higher the likelihood the patient could experience serious vision and other health complications, including stroke, heart attack, congestive heart failure and permanent loss of sight. When it comes to vision, hypertension can lead to fluid buildup under the retina, blood vessel damage and destroyed nerve cells. In addition to threatening the anatomy of the eye, high blood pressure is also a cause of stroke, which can impair the optic nerve or damage the area of the brain responsible for processing images.

"Every patient is different," professes Dr. Marquardt. "Some may not experience any early warning signs of a heart condition. Other patients may experience symptoms that are easily ignored or overlooked, such as sporadic, brief periods of blurred vision."

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, "Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Wisconsin, accounting for more than 2 out of every 10 deaths statewide." Perhaps even more frightening is that 2 out of 5 Wisconsin adults have hypertension and are unaware of their condition. The good news is, most cardiovascular conditions can be controlled or even prevented, if individuals are proactive about their health.

Regardless of whether or not you have been diagnosed with a cardiovascular condition, WOA members encourage you to schedule a comprehensive eye examination with a licensed Doctor of Optometry as a component of your overall health care regimen. If you experience any of the following vision symptoms the WOA recommends contacting your eye doctor as soon as possible:

- sudden blurred or double vision
- trouble reading or focusing on near-work
- eye pain or pressure
- a noticeable aura or dark ring around lights or illuminated objects
- visible dark spots in your vision
- images of flashing lights

Individuals with heart conditions should take prescribed medication as directed, stick to a healthy diet, exercise regularly, control high blood pressure, and avoid both alcohol and smoking.

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. Over 620 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 website at www.woa-eyes.org.