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JANUARY IS GLAUCOMA AWARENESS MONTH

The Wisconsin Optometric Association urges residents to take a preventative stance against vision loss

Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness in the United States and affects nearly 4 million Americans, however only half of these individuals are aware they have the condition. In order to raise the public's awareness regarding the effects of this disease, the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) encourages Wisconsin residents to visit their optometrist for a comprehensive eye examination as a preventative eye care measure.

"Glaucoma is the silent theft of sight," said Dr. Marcus Neitzke, optometrist and 2010 WOA president. "It develops slowly and without any symptoms, therefore most people are not aware they have the condition until significant vision loss has already occurred."

Glaucoma is a degenerative eye disorder that gradually destroys the cells which make up the optic nerve. The optic nerve carries visual information from the eye to the brain. Untreated, glaucoma can cause significant vision loss and even blindness.

"Glaucoma cannot currently be prevented and vision lost to glaucoma cannot be restored," adds Dr. Neitzke. "However, if diagnosed and treated early by a licensed eye care professional, in most cases it can be managed."

The only way to guarantee detection of this disorder is through a comprehensive eye exam. The Wisconsin Optometric Association therefore recommends eye exams every two years for adults under age 60 and every year thereafter. Eye doctors may recommend more frequent appointments based on an individual's overall health, risk factors or family history.

Individuals at particular risk for glaucoma include adults over 60 years of age, African Americans, people with a family history of glaucoma, and those who have had severe eye trauma. Some studies suggest high amounts of nearsightedness, cardiovascular disease and diabetes may also be risk factors for the development of glaucoma.

"Even though an individual may be in a 'higher risk' category than others, there is no way to know if sure that you have glaucoma unless you have an annual exam," said Dr. Neitzke.

If you have any questions, please contact the Wisconsin Optometric Association at 608.824.2200 or visit <http://www.woa-eyes.org> for a list of licensed optometrists in your area.

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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.