



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JANUARY 2013

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JANUARY IS NATIONAL GLAUCOMA AWARENESS MONTH: PROTECT YOUR VISION

The Wisconsin Optometric Association urges everyone to see their eye doctor for a comprehensive, dilated eye exam

MADISON, WI – Up to four million Americans currently have glaucoma, and yet half of this population may be unaware they even have the disease. Glaucoma attacks eyesight without the presence of early warning signs, and by the time symptoms do appear, it may be too late to save those affected from permanent vision loss. Although the disease cannot be prevented, it can be controlled if diagnosed and treated early by a licensed eye doctor. Protect your sight by receiving a comprehensive, dilated exam performed by your optometrist. January is National Glaucoma Awareness month, and the member doctors of the **Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA)** strongly encourage everyone to visit their local optometrist for a comprehensive, dilated eye examination in order to protect their vision and eye health from this often misunderstood but severe condition.

“Glaucoma is often labeled the sneak thief of sight,” explains Dr. Kellye Kneuppel, the 2013 WOA President and practicing optometrist in Brookfield, WI. “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. It begins by attacking peripheral vision, typically causing objects to appear less clearly. Such changes may seem minor, but glaucoma can accelerate quickly, causing eyesight to rapidly and irreversibly deteriorate. Untreated, glaucoma can cause significant vision loss and even blindness.

“There is no current cure for glaucoma, and you cannot restore vision already lost to the disease,” remarks Dr. Kneuppel. “However, if diagnosed and treated early by a licensed eye doctor, it can be managed in most cases.”

The only way to guarantee detection of this condition is through a comprehensive, dilated eye exam, and the WOA recommends regular eye exams for adults and children. Eye doctors will recommend the appropriate frequency of these appointments based on an individual’s overall health, risk factors, or family history.

As with many diseases, factors such as age, race, and/or genetics can increase the risk of developing glaucoma. Those at high-risk for developing glaucoma include the following populations:

- Adults over 60 years of age, especially Hispanic Americans
- African Americans - Glaucoma is the leading cause of blindness among African American populations
- Those with a family history of glaucoma
- Diabetics

Despite its prevalence among certain populations, glaucoma can strike individuals of all ages and backgrounds. “Even though an individual may be in a ‘higher risk’ category than others, the only way to know for certain that you have glaucoma is to have a comprehensive, dilated vision and eye health exam provided by a licensed eye doctor,” confirms Dr. Kneuppel.

Please visit the WOA website, www.woa-eyes.org, for a list of licensed optometrists in your area and schedule your comprehensive, dilated eye exam today.

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 630 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.