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THE EYES PROVIDE A WINDOW TO DIABETES DIAGNOSIS

Protect your vision and schedule a comprehensive eye examination with a licensed eye doctor

MADISON, WI – Diabetes has a significant impact on an individual's overall health, and the economic costs the disease places on the nation in medical services rendered for diabetic patients is substantial. According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), diabetes now affects 29 million Americans. While many know that diabetes affects a sizable contingent of the population, they may be unaware of the important role eye doctors play in the diagnosis and care of the diabetic patient. The members of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) encourage all citizens to visit their eye doctor for a yearly, comprehensive eye exam to ensure the early detection of diabetes and prevention of complications from this disease.

According to WOA President and Platteville, WI optometrist Dr. Michael Tashner, "A comprehensive dilated eye examination is crucial to the early detection and prevention of diabetes-related complications." As Dr. Tashner explains, "The eye is the only place on the body that blood vessels can be seen without having to look through skin or tissue. As a result, optometrists can detect many diseases that affect our blood vessels, such as diabetes, which allows patients to seek treatment before they progress to something more serious."

If left untreated, diabetes can have incredibly damaging effects on an individual's vision and eye health. "We are seeing a growing number of diabetes cases among people who, for one reason or another, do not actively monitor their diabetes risk," professes Dr. Tashner. "It's simple, the longer the condition progresses before it is diagnosed, the higher the likelihood the patient could experience serious vision and eye health complications."

One such complication is diabetic retinopathy, the most common diabetic eye disease and, according to AOA, the leading cause of preventable blindness among American adults. Diabetic retinopathy is the result of damage to the small blood vessels located in the retina (the light-reflecting tissue in the eye) caused by diabetes. The blood vessels leak blood and other fluids, causing swelling of the retinal tissue and clouded vision. Symptoms of the disease may include fluctuating or blurring of vision, occasional double vision, night vision problems, and flashers/floaters seen by one or both eyes.

Early symptoms of diabetic vision and eye health disorders are often subtle or go unnoticed. Frequently, there are no obvious symptoms for the patient to recognize in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. Dr. Tashner says this makes optometrists' role even more important because eye doctors provide a detailed examination of the eyes as part of their services rendered for comprehensive vision and eye health care. In addition to their risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, according to AOA, those with diabetes are 40 percent more likely than people without the disease to suffer from glaucoma. Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases characterized by damage to the optic nerve, resulting in gradual peripheral vision loss. Also, individuals with diabetes are 60 percent more likely to develop cataracts, whereby the eye's clear lens clouds, blocking light and interfering with normal vision.

Protecting Your Vision

Regardless of whether or not you have been diagnosed with diabetes, WOA members encourage you to schedule a comprehensive eye examination with a licensed eye doctor as a component of your overall health care regimen. If you experience 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, or images of flashing lights, WOA recommends contacting your eye doctor as soon as possible. Individuals with diabetes 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. Approximately 640 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.