Risk of blindness from glaucoma drops by half

A new study indicates that the likelihood of blindness in glaucoma patients 20 years after diagnosis has fallen by half in the last generation.

Researchers compared people with glaucoma diagnosed between 1981 and 2000 with patients diagnosed between 1965 and 1980. They found that the incidence of the disease did not change but the risk of going blind in at least one eye fell from about 26% in the earlier group to less than 14% in the later group. They also found that the annual incidence of glaucoma-caused blindness dropped by more than half.

While noting that better treatment and management of patients seem to have had an impact, Mayo clinic study author Dr. Arthur Sit added that more public education and research are needed.

“A 14% blindness rate from a common eye disease is hardly ideal,” he said.
– Ophthalmology, January 2014

Glaucoma linked to Sleep Apnea

Researchers from Taipei Medical University found that people with sleep apnea were far more likely to develop glaucoma in the five years after diagnosis than those without the sleep disorder. The association is significant because of the large number of people worldwide who have the two conditions.
– Ophthalmology, September 2013

Calling All Members!

We need you, your families and friends to walk or run in the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon on Sunday, October 19, 2014 and help raise money for glaucoma research

Last year your Society’s first time participation in the marathon raised close to $42,000 for research! This year with your help, we can do even better.
As president, it gives me great pleasure to advise members that our research scientists are currently evaluating the 19 applications for research grants that we received for funding this year. That's a 75% increase over 2013’s applications.

Thanks to a successful year in raising money, we estimate that GRSC will be able to provide over $200,000 in research grants in 2014. The Board and I sincerely thank donors for making this possible.

Special thanks to the Estate of Mary Nicholson, donors Nancy Thompson, Pfizer Canada and the Allergan International Foundation, Graham and Judy Weeks and the McColl-Early Foundation who have given so generously.

Our heartfelt appreciation also to vice-president Renée Wolfe for once again organizing the Tealeess Tea fundraiser that brought in more than $83,000 for glaucoma research.

Also in 2013, the Society took part in the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon, raising close to $42,000. We congratulate all the participants and their fundraising efforts which made this event such an outstanding success.

Special thanks to executive secretary Dr. Mark Shaffer who spearheaded our first time involvement in the Marathon and to dedicated volunteer Susan Schouela who put in many hours to ensure the smooth registration of participants.

Susan is already hard at work organizing our participation in this year’s Marathon which will take place on Sunday, October 19. Plan now to lace up your shoes and take part, or support GRSC participants with a monetary contribution.

I want to remind members that they can also make donations through the United Way or through corporate programs by asking that their donations be directed to the GRSC. For further information, please contact our office.

And I can't urge you enough to remember the GRSC in your wills as these gifts will continue to sustain our research and at the same time save you income taxes by as much as 46% of your gift.

I look forward to welcoming everyone at our 2014 Annual General Meeting starting at 5:30 pm on Monday, October 6 in the re-opened Conference Centre at the CNIB, 1929 Bayview Avenue, Toronto.

– Martin Chasson, President

Birth control pills may increase glaucoma risk

A preliminary study suggests that women who took birth control pills for more than three years were twice as likely to have been diagnosed with glaucoma.

Lead researcher Dr. Shan Lin, professor of clinical ophthalmology at the University of California, San Francisco suggested that women on the pill for three or more years should be screened for glaucoma and followed closely by an ophthalmologist, especially if they have any other existing risk factors.

Previous studies have shown that estrogen may play an important role in developing glaucoma. Birth control pills contain either estrogen and progestin combined, or progestin only.

Although the study did not prove a cause-and-effect relationship between the use of birth control pills and glaucoma, the findings should help spur future research to explain the link, Lin noted.

– Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, November 2013
Dr. Rajiv Bindlish answers your questions about glaucoma

What is an iStent? How does it work?
An iStent is a small titanium device that can be implanted in the eye’s internal drain to help it drain more. Some glaucoma patients may be candidates for iStents during cataract surgery.
iStents are indicated for early, mild to moderate, open angle glaucoma. They may eliminate one or more glaucoma drugs. Their main limitations are cost and the lack of long-term studies.

What is Ocular Hypertension? Does it need treatment?
Ocular Hypertension occurs when the eye’s pressure is elevated (greater than 22) but there is no damage to the optic nerve or visual field.
Many years ago, patients with eye pressure greater than 22 were treated for glaucoma.
The Ocular Hypertension Treatment Study concluded that not every patient with elevated eye pressure needed treatment. In the study, some patients worsened despite treatment and over 80% of untreated patients did not worsen.
The study found other risk factors that contributed to glaucoma and these factors combined with elevated eye pressure may indicate the need for treatment.

Is stem cell research having positive implications for people with glaucoma? Are any stem cell trials taking place?
Stem cell research is still in its infancy in glaucoma. Target areas in the eye include repairing the internal drain of the eye or the area that helps you see in the retina. I don’t know of any current human clinical trials.

I've been taking various drugs including Travatan, Lumigan and Xalatan for 15 years to maintain the pressure in my eyes. They all give me headaches. Can you suggest alternatives without that side effect?
The prostaglandin medications you listed can have headaches as a side effect. You might want to try Timolol (beta blocker), Alphagan or Trusopt/Azopt (Carbonic Anhydrase inhibitor). You may also want to consider laser treatment or surgery.

How long does it take for vision to return after a trabeculectomy? If it doesn’t totally return, can the lens be replaced as with cataract surgery?
It is not uncommon for vision to be blurry for 8 to 10 weeks after surgery, especially if you are still taking steroid eye drops such as prednisolone or Maxidex.
Also if your eye pressure is a little on the low side that can cause the blurry vision.
Once the lens of the eye is replaced after cataract surgery, it is rarely ever replaced again. Later on you may benefit from a YAG Capsulotomy laser to polish the lens.

What should the normal eye pressure be a year after surgery for glaucoma?
There is no such thing as normal pressure.
To treat glaucoma, doctors set individualized targets where they hope no further glaucoma damage to the optic nerve or visual field will occur. The more glaucoma damage, the lower the target.

Questions about glaucoma?
Email your questions to info@glaucomaresearch.ca
or call 416-483-0200 1-877-483-0204
Dr. Bindlish will answer selected questions in upcoming newsletters.
The Glaucoma Research Society of Canada is a national registered charity funding research into finding a cure for glaucoma. Since 1989, GRSC has raised over three million dollars for research.
Charitable Registration No 889178695 RR0001

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Mark your Calendars
Annual General Meeting
Monday, October 6, 2014
5:30 pm
Back at CNIB Location
1929 Bayview Avenue
Toronto
Free above ground parking

Looking for a Unique & Memorable Gift to Mark a Milestone?
Whether it’s for a birthday, wedding, graduation, anniversary, bar/bat mitzvah or the passing of a loved one, a donation to the Glaucoma Research Society of Canada is a meaningful and lasting way to express your sentiments.
Your gift funds researchers working to find more effective treatments and a cure for glaucoma.
It’s easy to donate over the phone, through our secure website, or by mail.
For every donation, we will send you a letter acknowledging your gift and a tax deductible receipt.

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