

REPORT

Better Health Through Research

June 2008



Troubling New Findings for African-Americans with Glaucoma

Study finds links between glaucoma and heart attack

African-Americans with glaucoma are at a higher risk of dying from heart attacks, according to a study published in the March issue of *Archives of Ophthalmology*.

The study, led by Suh-Yuh Wu, M.A., of Stony Brook University, looked at more than 4,000 subjects in Barbados and found that the risk of death from cardiovascular causes was 38 percent higher in people with diagnosed and treated open-angle glaucoma – and 91 percent higher in people whose glaucoma had been treated with a beta-blocker called timolol maleate. Cardiovascular deaths were also 28 percent higher in people with high levels of pressure in their eyes.

“These findings underscore the importance of close monitoring and controlling of adequate intraocular pressure levels in this and other high-risk populations,” the study’s authors wrote.

Open-angle glaucoma is already the major cause of blindness in African-Americans. African-American populations are also more likely than white populations to die from chronic disease and high intraocular pressure. But this newly

SEE YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY IF...

- You suffer from recurrent blurry vision.
- You see rainbow-hued halos around lights at night.
- You believe your peripheral (side) vision is decreasing.
- You get pain around your eyes after watching tv or leaving a dark theatre.

discovered linkage between glaucoma and heart disease has left scientists theorizing about what could lie behind it.

Some evidence suggests that the two conditions share similar risk factors. Increased mortality rates may also be tied to the beta-blockers and other medications used to treat glaucoma and other eye conditions.

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President's Corner

Getting the word out

Glaucoma is a terrible disease — and terribly quiet.

In its early stages, it can be virtually symptom-free. As a result, scientists tell us, more than half of all people with glaucoma don't even know they have it. This is particularly unfortunate because early detection is key to slowing this disease's progress.

One of the best ways to save people, then, is to educate them. And on that score, we still have a long way to go.

According to a survey reported in this issue of **National Glaucoma Research Report**, nearly a quarter of Americans aren't getting the facts they need to protect their eyes from glaucoma and other eye conditions.

Clearly, we have to reach these people. In part we can do that by educating health-care providers and by targeting higher-risk populations. But ultimately, the most effective way to pass word is through conversation.

If you haven't already, I urge you talk to your friends and loved ones. Tell them how important regular eye care is. Send them this newsletter, if you think it would be helpful, or refer them to our website (www.ahaf.org). Together, we can get the word out — and lay the groundwork for early and effective glaucoma treatment.

Brian K. Regan, Ph.D., President

Americans Don't Know Enough about Eye Health, Study Finds

Very few aware of glaucoma's dangerous "no warning signs" approach

Too many Americans don't know the dangers or symptoms of glaucoma and don't get enough information about eye health and disease, says a new survey sponsored by the National Eye Foundation and the Lions Clubs International Foundation.

The telephone survey of more than 3,000 randomly selected adults found that only 8 percent knew that glaucoma has no early warning signs. In addition, although more than 90 percent of the respondents had recently seen a health care provider, nearly one quarter of them had not received any

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www.ahaf.org

Logon to our website at www.ahaf.org and click on the National Glaucoma Research link to learn more about what's new in the world of research, as well as important information about risk factors for glaucoma.

continued from Americans Don't Know ...

information about how to maintain eye health.

The lack of data was particularly acute in Hispanic respondents. Some 41 percent of them had not seen or heard anything about eye health within the past year, as opposed to 28 percent of Asians, 26 percent of African-Americans, and 16 percent of Caucasians.

“Good eyesight is important to our quality of life,” said Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D., director of the National Eye Institute, “and it is essential for adults to have accurate information to help them make informed decisions about their eye health needs.

These survey results will help us identify specific ways in which we can close the gap in knowledge about eye diseases and address the disparities that exist.”

The National Eye Institute has now pledged to reach out to underinformed populations. This work will be part of a mounting worldwide campaign to enhance understanding of glaucoma and other eye diseases. On March 6, 2008, for example, glaucoma institutions, medical professionals and patient support groups joined forces for an international array of awareness-raising activities. These efforts were given an additional boost when Mayor Michael Bloomberg officially proclaimed World Glaucoma Day in New York City.

Major Form of Glaucoma Is Genetically Linked

Findings raise possibility of targeted therapies

A team of European scientists has found that two common variations in the human genome sequence are behind nearly every case of a major subtype of glaucoma.

In a study published in the journal *Science*, scientists from deCODE genetics, in conjunction with researchers from Iceland and Sweden, reported that single letter variations in the LOXL1 gene sequence put people at 100 percent risk of developing exfoliation glaucoma.

Until now, scientists have understood relatively little about exfoliation glaucoma, which is caused by the buildup of fibrous deposits in the front of the eye. The condition has often proved resistant to drug treatment, but these recent findings raise the possibility of someday eliminating this



glaucoma subtype altogether by neutralizing the impact of the genetic variations.

“We plan to conduct additional studies to examine how we can take advantage of this finding to begin drug discovery,” said Karl Stefansson, CEO of deCODE.

A Retirement Plan that Gives Back

Charitable gift annuities benefit givers and receivers alike

If you want to advance the work of National Glaucoma Research *and* ensure a steady stream of income for yourself or your loved ones, you may want to consider a charitable gift annuity.

A charitable gift annuity essentially is a contract under which you transfer cash or other assets, such as stocks or bonds, to National Glaucoma Research. In exchange, you receive a fixed sum of money, paid out over a lifetime period.

An annuity can be set up for one or two people — for example, a husband and wife, an aunt and a niece, or a father and a daughter. Married couples often choose a charitable gift annuity to help ensure that they both can enjoy an income they can rely on for life.

What do annuitants receive?

- Security of fixed payments for life;
- Flexible payments on *your* schedule (annual, semi-annual, quarterly or monthly);
- Income tax benefits; and
- Attractive payment rates.

For more information on this unique way of giving, contact:

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*Thank you
for thinking of
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GLAUCOMA
RESEARCH!*



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