



## **PRESS RELEASE**

TO: Editor in Charge

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **REGULAR EYECARE EXAMS STATISTICALLY LOWERS RISK OF DEMENTIA**

*(Honolulu, Hawaii)*, January 19, 2011 – Poor vision can worsen the effects of Alzheimer’s disease according to a study “Untreated Poor Vision: A Contributing Factor to Late-Life Dementia” published in the American Journal of Epidemiology by researchers at the University of Michigan. According to the study, elderly individuals who have reduced vision seem to show more mental decline over time. The study found that when elderly patients visited an ophthalmologist at least once, there was a 65% reduction in risk of dementia, or two out of three patients who might have developed Alzheimer’s didn’t. For those who had not seen an eye specialist, there was a 9 fold increased risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease and a five-fold increase of mental impairment without dementia.

The researchers looked at the medical records of 625 elderly Medicare recipients who had normal cognitive function at baseline. Their vision, whether they had seen an ophthalmologist, and whether they had eye disorders treated were evaluated. Results showed that those who had better vision at baseline were less likely to develop dementia. Patients who did not visit an ophthalmologist had the highest risk of developing dementia.

Several factors may explain these findings. First, lack of visual input seems to cause changes in the brain’s structure according to past studies. Second, good vision helps people engage in other cognitive activities which have been shown to reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s disease. Third, people who have untreated eye problems such as cataract and diabetic retinopathy may become depressed, and perhaps become functionally incapacitated earlier.

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Improving vision has long been recognized by eye specialists as improving mental function in patients with Alzheimer's disease. "We often see Alzheimer's patients grow more alert following cataract surgery," says Dr. Christopher Tortora, M.D., of the Hawaiian Eye Center, "We have always assumed that sensory deprivation contributes to depression and declining mental function. When we improve vision by removing a cataract, a patient's level of functioning often improves."

In today's world where there is so much that can be done to maintain and improve vision as we age, it's critical to have a regular eye examination to maintain not only good vision, but good brain power as well.

Dr. Tortora, a board certified ophthalmologist, is host of "The Hawaiian Eye Show," a weekly informational radio program about healthy vision. He and his colleagues at Hawaiian Eye Center are committed to educating the public about the importance of preventative eye care. To learn more about a variety of eye health issues, please call the Hawaiian Eye Center at 621-8488 where "*life has never looked better.*"

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