



PRESS RELEASE

TO: Editor in Charge

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Early Detection Still the Best Treatment for Age-Related Macular Degeneration

(Honolulu, Hawaii), March 24, 2009 – An estimated 14 million people worldwide are living with Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD). For those over the age of 50, it is the leading cause of visual impairment. Though a cure for AMD has not yet been developed, there are new treatments available for people experiencing vision loss. The American Academy of Ophthalmology designates March as Age-Related Macular Degeneration / Low Vision Awareness Month to encourage residents to get screened for AMD and other age related vision impairments through regular eye examinations.

“AMD is usually painless so many patients are unaware that they have it,” said Christopher Tortora, M.D., Medical Director of Hawaiian Eye Center in Wahiawa. “Patients who have hypertension, a history of smoking, a family history of AMD, are overweight, and especially those over the age of 50 should consult an eye care professional regularly. If these high-risk people have not been checked in the past 2 years, they should schedule an examination with an eye specialist.”

AMD is a common disease that affects the macula, an area on the retina that controls central vision. The illness causes light-sensitive cells in the macula to break down making central vision appear blurry, but having no effect on peripheral vision. As a result, AMD does not lead to total blindness.

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The two forms of AMD are “wet” and “dry.” Most people do not notice their vision changing in the early “dry” stage when yellowish deposits called drusen develop under the retina inside the eye. As “dry” AMD develops, the center vision becomes more and more blurred until vision is lost. “Wet” AMD, also known as advanced AMD, occurs with the growth of abnormal blood vessels under the macula. With “wet” AMD, straight lines may appear wavy. Loss of central vision also develops quickly with “wet” AMD, and many people notice a sudden change in their vision.

Research for AMD treatments continue to uncover findings essential to those living with the illness. For example, recent findings show that high levels of antioxidants and zinc can actually slow the progression of dry AMD. Another discovery shows that injectable medicines can reduce the risk of moderate to severe vision loss for those with certain forms of “wet” macular degeneration. In some cases, they can even bring back vision that’s been lost.

“Though AMD research is giving us new treatments, early detection is still key,” says Dr. Tortora. “Be sure to make regular visits to your eye doctor every one to two years for a complete exam if you think you may be at risk to develop AMD.”

For those with advanced vision loss from AMD, there are a number of options, both high tech and low tech, to allow them to make maximum use of the vision they have. An eye specialist can provide information on low vision clinics and low vision aids.

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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