

GLAUCOMA AWARENESS

January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month

Currently, more than 3 million people in the United States have glaucoma. The National Eye Institute projects this number will reach 4.2 million by 2030, a 58 percent increase.

Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness. Moreover, among African American and Latino populations, glaucoma is more prevalent. Glaucoma is 6 to 8 times more common in African Americans than Caucasians.

Over 3 million Americans, and over 60 million people worldwide, have glaucoma and half of them don't know they have it. Combined with our aging population, we can see an epidemic of blindness looming if we don't raise awareness about the importance of regular eye examinations to preserve vision. The World Health Organization estimates that 4.5 million people worldwide are blind due to glaucoma.

The Ocular Hypertension Treatment Study has defined increased intraocular pressure, a thinner cornea, family history and myopia as significant risk factors.

Recently we have seen a lot of advances: new medications, especially the Rho-kinase inhibitors, and new surgical techniques, like the

MIGS procedures and the XEN gel stent.

For the treatment of early to moderate glaucoma, the field of MIGS procedures has brought a lot of changes, but the number of available devices and techniques is very overwhelming. There is the iStent, iStent inject, Hydrus implant, various devices for goniotomy (Kahook Dual blade, iTrack, GATT, Trabectome, Trab360), and canaloplasty (iTrack, Trab360). Time will hopefully tell which of the procedures is most effective for which type of glaucoma with the least side effects.

The family of drainage implants has also seen an addition. The Ahmed Clearpath comes in two sizes, 250 and 350mm². It behaves like the Baerveldt implant, but the plate is more flexible and the positioning holes are more anteriorly located making placement of the device easier.

There have been some cautionary tales as well, seen with the recall of the CyPass microshunt. Three-year results had shown a decrease in the corneal endothelial cell count.

Cyclophotocoagulation, usually seen as a therapy of last resort, has made a comeback with the introduction of the Micropulse CycloG6 Laser. The procedure causes less postoperative side effects, especially less inflammation and pain. It is now being

used more and more even earlier in the course of the disease.

However, even with all these advances, a trabeculectomy with or without implantation of an ExPress shunt and with or without the application of Mitomycin still has a place in the treatment of severe glaucoma when the intraocular pressure needs to be in the single digits.

Also of concern remains the high cost for medications. Not only is the access to branded medications more and more restricted by many insurance companies, but the price even for generic medications has also increased significantly.

In summary, glaucoma can be a very devastating disease. There are still many challenges, but there have been many advances recently that allow us to treat glaucoma more effectively and keep our patients seeing during their lifetime.

by: Joern B. Soltau, MD

To schedule an appointment at the Kentucky Lions Eye Center, please call 502-588-0588.

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