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OPEN YOUR EYES TO DIABETES: SC Ranks 10th highest in the nation

The SC Optometric Physicians Association reminds consumers about the importance of comprehensive eye exams during November's National Diabetes Awareness Month

[CITY], [STATE], (DATE) – In honor of National Diabetes Awareness Month, the SC Optometric Physicians Association (SCOPA) and the American Optometric Association (AOA), urges Americans living with diabetes and diabetic eye disease to schedule dilated, comprehensive eye exams on a yearly basis. The percent of South Carolinians with diabetes who have had an eye exam within the last year is only 51.8% - this should over 90%.

Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in South Carolina after heart disease, cancer, accidents, stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease and Alzheimer's.

According to recent studies, diabetes is responsible for eight percent of legal blindness, making it the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults 20-74 years of age. Each year, 12,000 – 24,000 people lose their sight because of diabetes. The key to successful eye care is to monitor the disease, including vision, which is why the SCOPA/AOA recommends those with diabetes have a dilated eye examination annually. More frequent exams may be needed if you have diabetic retinopathy, or if you notice a change in your vision.

"During a dilated exam, an optometrist will look at your retina for early signs of diabetic eye disease, such as leaking blood vessels, swelling and deposits on the retina," said Dr. [name], [title]. "Optometrists often serve as the first line of detection for diabetes, since the eye is the only place on the body that blood vessels can be seen without having to look through the skin."

Results from the AOA's new American Eye-Q® consumer survey showed that only 36 percent of people realize that diabetes can be detected during a comprehensive eye exam. In addition, 47 percent didn't know that a person with diabetes who does not wear corrective lenses should still receive an annual eye exam.

Diabetic retinopathy often has no early warning signs, so changes in vision may not be noticed. Therefore, early detection is critical in maintaining healthy vision. The percent of South Carolinians with diabetes who have been diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy is 20.2%.

“By the year 2020, the number of people suffering from diabetic eye disease is expected to nearly double” said Dr. [name]. “However, monitoring and maintaining control of diabetes through regular visits to the doctor along with adherence to the doctor’s instructions can lower one’s risk of developing diabetic eye disease by as much as 76 percent.”

Several factors influence whether someone with diabetes develops diabetic retinopathy. These include controlling blood sugar and blood pressure levels, the length of time with diabetes, race and family history. The longer a person has diabetes, the more likely they are to develop diabetic retinopathy. If left untreated, diabetic retinopathy can cause blindness.

In regards to race, both African-Americans and Hispanics are nearly twice as likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic whites. According to the American Diabetes Association, on average, about 2.5 million, or 9.5 percent of Hispanics and 3.2 million, or 13.3 percent of African Americans aged 20 years or older have been diagnosed with diabetes. **Approximately 1 in 8 African Americans in South Carolina has diabetes. This is the sixteenth highest rate of diabetes among African Americans in the nation.**

Be sure to see an optometrist if your vision becomes blurry, if you have trouble reading, experience double vision, feel pressure in your eyes, encounter straight lines appearing wavy or if your side vision is limited.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on eye health, and diabetic retinopathy, please visit www.aoa.org.

About the survey:

The fifth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From April 14-21, 2010, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,007 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level)

About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient’s overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor’s degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.