



For Immediate Release

Media Contact:

Melisa Moore
503-219-9296

Don't close your eyes to vision care during this tough economic time

Economy delays some Oregonian's decisions on proper vision care; optometric physicians warn of long-term risks and offer short-term solutions

PORTLAND, ORE. [June 4, 2009] – A new survey by the Oregon Optometric Physician's Association (OOPA) shows some Oregonians are delaying eye care, a decision that can potentially have long term effects on their overall eye health.

The survey of 400 members of the OOPA conducted during the last week of April, shows 38 percent of respondents reported an increase in the number of "no shows" for patient appointments since the downturn in the economy. The survey further reveals 36 percent of responding doctors have experienced a *decrease* in *appointment bookings* overall.

"We understand that many people are deferring eye care expenses, hoping for an improvement in the economy," said Dr. Todd Briscoe, Portland-area optometric physician. "We want patients to realize three things. First that there are risks in delaying eye care which can lead to higher costs and more serious health concerns later. Second, many medical insurance plans offer coverage related to eye health; and third, there are things patients can do on their own to help maintain good vision."

Risks of delay

Eye exams can detect or monitor a host of eye diseases and disorders for which early treatment can reduce long term progression. Two specific examples are glaucoma and diabetes, both of which can lead to blindness if not managed properly.

In responding to the survey, one physician described a case in which a contact lens wearer, who was experiencing redness of the eye, put off an eye exam. Consequently, that patient was diagnosed with a corneal ulcer that required antibiotics and three medical visits to treat. The patient's delay in getting treatment ended up costing four times the amount that the original appointment would have cost, and caused corneal scarring and increased night glare.

Respondents of the OOPA member survey also revealed that some patients are unwisely stretching out their medications by taking them every other day instead of every day. Failure to take a medication as it is prescribed decreases the effectiveness of the medicine and can stall treatment.

Medical Insurance

Thirty-five percent of respondents said that some of their patients have lost their benefits for vision care. "But it's important for patients to realize that even if they've lost their vision coverage, many medical eye evaluations and treatments are covered under their regular medical insurance plans," commented Briscoe.

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Patient Action

The OOPA reminds patients that they should take some important steps to maintain their eye health. These include:

1. Don't skimp on proper contact lens solutions, cleaning, or timely replacement because skipping these vital steps invites infections or other complications that can be costly to treat.
2. Don't smoke, because smoking has been shown to be a risk factor in the development of macular degeneration.
3. Eat a healthy diet packed with spinach and other dark, leafy greens which can have positive effects on your eyes.
4. Keep contact lenses and/or eyeglasses clean, which can reduce glare and lessen eye strain.
5. When viewing a TV or computer screen, look away every few minutes to give your eyes a break.
6. Check with your health insurance provider to stay up-to-date of any changes to your vision benefits.

About the Oregon Optometric Physicians Association

The Oregon Optometric Physicians Association is a statewide organization comprised of Doctors of Optometry, college of optometry faculty, optometric students and industry-related associates. It advocates advancing the quality, availability and accessibility of eye, vision and related health care. It also works to represent the profession of optometry, to enhance and promote the independent and ethical decision making of its members, and to assist optometric physicians in practicing the highest standards of patient care. Based in Milwaukie, Oregon, the OOPA has nearly 400 members. For more information, visit www.oregonoptometry.org.