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Glaucoma May Be Stealing Your Sight

PORTLAND, OR (January 13, 2009) – Glaucoma - often called “the sneak thief of sight” because it can strike without symptoms - is one of the leading causes of blindness in the United States. Unfortunately, 91 percent of Americans incorrectly believe glaucoma is preventable, according to the American Optometric Association’s third annual American Eye-Q® survey.

Although glaucoma is not preventable, The Oregon Optometric Physicians Association says if diagnosed and treated early, the disease can be controlled with eye drops, medicines, laser treatment or surgery. January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month and a good time to become educated on the disease.

Approximately 2.2 million Americans age 40 and older have glaucoma, according to National Glaucoma Research and as many as 120,000 are blind because of the disease. The number of Americans with glaucoma is estimated to increase to 3.3 million by the year 2020, as baby boomers age.

“As glaucoma progresses, you may eventually notice your side vision failing,” said Dr. Todd Briscoe, Portland-area optometric physician. “Without treatment, glaucoma slowly steals your peripheral vision, making it seem as though you are looking through a tunnel. This can’t be recovered, so you need to have it detected early -- and treated.”

Glaucoma occurs when internal pressure in the eye increases enough to cause damage to the optic nerve, leading to loss of nerve tissue and vision. The most common type, primary open-angle glaucoma, develops gradually and painlessly. A much rarer type, acute angle-closure glaucoma, can occur rapidly and its symptoms may include blurred vision, loss of peripheral vision, seeing colored rings around lights, and pain or redness in the eyes.

Anyone can develop glaucoma. However, some people are at higher risk than others. They include:

- African-Americans over age 40
- Anyone age 60 and older, especially Hispanics
- People with a family history of glaucoma

Dilating the eyes in examination allows a doctor to see the retina, optic nerve and vessels in the back of the eye more clearly. Yet, even though African-Americans and Hispanics are genetically more susceptible to glaucoma, 37 percent of those surveyed did not have their eyes dilated during their last eye exam.

The Oregon Optometric Physicians Association recommends comprehensive eye exams every two years for adults under age 60 and every year thereafter. Your doctor may recommend more frequent exams depending on your medical or family history.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on glaucoma and other issues concerning eye health, please visit www.oregonoptometry.org or www.aoa.org.



About the survey

The third annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned by the American Optometric Association in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 17-19, 2008, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,001 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 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.

About the American Optometric Association

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 more than two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.