



World Ophthalmology Congress 2010

Dangerous Visual Field Loss

Glaucoma increases risk of falls and accidents

Berlin, May 2010 – Glaucoma causes vision loss, which severely reduces peripheral vision. This often leads to falls and accidents: the risk of falling in glaucoma patients is four times higher than in those who have healthy vision. They are also at risk when driving without being aware of it themselves. The German Society of Ophthalmology (DOG) draws attention to these risks in the run-up to the World Ophthalmology Congress (WOC® 2010). The world's largest ophthalmologic congress starts at the beginning of June in Berlin.

Glaucoma is the second most common cause of blindness worldwide. The condition often occurs due to high intraocular pressure, which causes permanent damage to the optic nerve. As the patient often has no symptoms, the disorder goes undetected for a long time. "Loss of vision begins outside the centre of vision. Glaucoma sufferers therefore very often do not notice the loss," explains Professor Dr. med. Dr. h.c. Franz Grehn, Secretary of the German Society of Ophthalmology (DOG) and Chairman of the Eye Department at Würzburg University Hospital, Germany. Thus, central visual acuity, e.g. reading, remains unaffected for a long time despite advanced optic nerve damage. More and more objects outside central vision are, however, overlooked. "Patients experience difficulty climbing stairs and perceiving thresholds and curbstones," Grehn explains in the run-up to WOC® 2010.

The inability to see obstacles presents many risks: studies have shown that the risk of falling over is 1.6 to four times higher in glaucoma patients than in people with healthy vision. "Glaucoma is among the most common causes of fractures of the neck of the femur in old age," Grehn reports.

Glaucoma poses a great risk if sufferers drive a car. According to legal requirements, the presence of visual field deficits in the central 30° binocular visual field is not permitted. Patients often do not notice that their ability to drive is impaired. "Objects suddenly appearing at the peripheral can easily be overlooked," Grehn warns. His team is therefore currently carrying out a

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study using a driving simulator to test sufferers' ability to drive. Some patients may succeed in compensating for visual field loss by increasing their eye movement, whereas others are highly prone to accidents. Furthermore, in the later stages of the condition, the ability to see light and dark is reduced by the gradual loss of optic nerve cells. "In sufferers the ability to see dark objects in central vision is poor. Light objects cause glare much earlier," elucidates Grehn, who will discuss the impact of glaucoma on the daily life of patients at WOC® 2010.

Blindness is not the inevitable fate of glaucoma sufferers. "If glaucoma is diagnosed early in a preventative medical check-up, it can, as a rule, respond well to treatment," Grehn explains. "Drugs which lower intraocular pressure are often able to prevent loss of sight."

In case of publication, we kindly request you to send us a specimen copy.

Date to remember:

Congress Session: Glaucoma Research Society Symposium: The impact of glaucoma on real life

Monday, 7 June 2010, 8.30 am to 10 am, room Abu Dhabi, ICC Berlin,
Neue Kantstraße/corner Messedamm, 14057 Berlin

Germany plays host in 2010 to the largest international ophthalmologic congress with the World Ophthalmology Congress (WOC® 2010). In addition to the International Congress of Ophthalmology (ICO), the Annual Congress of the German Society of Ophthalmology (DOG) and the German Academy of Ophthalmology (AAD) will take place under the umbrella of WOC® 2010. From 3 to 6 June, 2010, AAD courses will be held in German. The international program in English will follow from 5 to 9 June. The organizers expect over 8,000 attendees from some 120 countries.