

**July 2010**

**Media Release**

## **Glaucoma Blindness Increasing in New Zealand**

It is predicted the number of New Zealanders with glaucoma – the number one cause of preventable blindness in New Zealand – will reach about 76,000 by 2031.

An estimated 68,000 New Zealanders over the age of 40 already have glaucoma, and as the population ages and people continue to live longer, more people face the possibility of this devastating disease.

Chair of Glaucoma New Zealand, Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer, says glaucoma is a significant health issue.

“Fifty per cent of people with glaucoma in this country don’t know they have it as it slowly steals their vision. Most people experience no symptoms until it is too late to repair the damage that has been progressively getting worse over a long period of time,” she says.

Danesh-Meyer says the loss of vision can lead to increased rates of depression, more accidents involving hospital stays and rest home admissions, and a general loss of quality of life.

She stresses that the early detection of glaucoma is the key to preventing blindness.

“The condition can’t be cured; once the vision is gone, you can’t get it back, but modern treatments can halt its progression and preserve the sight that is left,” she says.

Danesh-Meyer says Glaucoma New Zealand urges everyone to follow the ‘45 plus 5’ rule – from the age of 45 have an eye examination for glaucoma every 5 years and then every 3 years from the age of 60.

GNZ also says it is really important for people to know if glaucoma runs in their family, because if it does, your risk increases ten-fold. Talk to your relatives - ask older family members if they can recall anybody taking eye drops because these may well have been for glaucoma.

Glaucoma New Zealand, a charitable trust set up to eliminate blindness from glaucoma in this country, provides free nationwide seminars, educational resources and support to those with glaucoma and their families, facilitates ongoing education for health professionals, contributes to glaucoma research and advocates for more affordable and accessible treatments in New Zealand.

2.

To help raise awareness of glaucoma and prevent more unnecessary blindness in New Zealand, GNZ is holding a nationwide July Awareness Appeal. Optometrists, Ophthalmologists, ASB Branches, Pharmacists and others around the country are supporting Glaucoma NZ's Appeal by taking donation boxes containing lens cleaning cloths and pens to offer to the public for a donation of \$3.00 each.

For more information about glaucoma, the July Awareness Appeal, and a full list of participants, visit [www.glaucoma.org.nz](http://www.glaucoma.org.nz), email [info@glaucoma.org.nz](mailto:info@glaucoma.org.nz) or phone **0800 GLAUCOMA (0800 452 826)**.

**For Further Comment:**

Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer  
Ophthalmologist  
Chair Glaucoma NZ

Phone: 021 229 1840  
Email: [h.daneshmeyer@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:h.daneshmeyer@auckland.ac.nz)

Helen Mawn  
Executive Manager  
Glaucoma NZ

Phone: 0800 452 826/09 373 8779  
Email: [h.mawn@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:h.mawn@auckland.ac.nz)