



MEDIA RELEASE

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Routine check-up saves TV reporter's eyesight

Newshub National Correspondent Patrick Gower was shocked when he was diagnosed with glaucoma during a routine eye examination.

"I have glaucoma. I was losing my sight – I was going blind, but I saved my sight and other people can too," says Patrick, a Glaucoma New Zealand Ambassador.

"I couldn't believe it. At age 40 you don't think you could go blind. It was pretty frightening," he says.

"I had no symptoms, no pain, nothing, but I was slowly losing my sight. But that's what glaucoma does. You don't have any symptoms until you have an eye test and then you find out you have it, or else you actually start losing your sight and by then it's too late."

Glaucoma is the name given to a group of diseases that damage the eye's optic nerve. The nerve fibres progressively die taking away the peripheral vision first. Therefore, there are no symptoms until the disease is quite advanced.

Known as the silent thief of sight, glaucoma is the leading cause of preventable blindness in New Zealand. It's estimated 91,000 Kiwis over 40 years have glaucoma, but only half of them know it. That leaves 45,000 people who could potentially lose their eyesight.

A family history of glaucoma can increase your risk of the disease tenfold, but Patrick has no known history of glaucoma in his family.

July annual appeal: Light up Glaucoma

Patrick was diagnosed with pigmentary glaucoma in July last year, a common form of glaucoma in people under 40.

He's become an Ambassador and is sharing his story for the first time in support of Glaucoma New Zealand's annual July appeal, Light up Glaucoma, to raise awareness and funds, and to encourage others to get their eyes checked.

"I'm so thankful I was getting regular check-ups, otherwise I would never have known I had glaucoma," he says.

Those regular check-ups with an ophthalmologist were due to previous eye problems.

"In the final days of the 2014 election campaign I had a detached retina. It required major surgery. It has no link to my glaucoma but I did start getting regular check-ups afterwards.

"Thanks to that bad luck with my eyes it meant I was more vigilant about my eye health and glaucoma was picked up at the earliest possible point."

After his glaucoma diagnosis, he immediately underwent laser surgery on both eyes.

"The surgery relieved the pressure and I have to use eye drops twice a day for the rest of my life to keep the pressure down."

Future looks bright

Thanks to catching it early, the prognosis is good. The treatment has halted the disease progressing and he has no problems with his sight as a result of glaucoma.

"There are 45,000 people out there who like me had no idea they had glaucoma. But like me if they get an eye examination, they can stop it getting worse," says Patrick.

"I don't think people know enough about glaucoma – I certainly didn't before I was diagnosed. That's why Glaucoma New Zealand's annual July appeal is so important because it raises awareness and funds to help stop people losing their sight."

Glaucoma New Zealand chairwoman Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer says for glaucoma detection it's recommended people have an eye examination by the age of 45 then every five years after that until age 60, then every two to three years after age 60.

“However, if you notice a change in your eyesight you should have an eye examination immediately or if you have a risk factor such as a family history of glaucoma, then you should get your eyes tested more frequently.

“It’s so important to raise awareness about glaucoma and remind people of the importance of getting regular eye examinations, because it could potentially save the sight of thousands of people,” Professor Danesh-Meyer says.

Donations can be made via Glaucoma New Zealand’s website www.glaucoma.org.nz (click on Support Us). Participating optometrists, ophthalmologists and pharmacies will also have Glaucoma NZ collection boxes in July.

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About Glaucoma New Zealand

Glaucoma New Zealand is a charitable trust that relies on public donations, sponsorship, grants and fundraising. It is not funded by the Government. The trust aims to eliminate blindness from glaucoma through: supporting research in New Zealand, raising public awareness, supporting people with glaucoma and providing education for health professionals.

For more information phone 0800 452 826, email info@glaucoma.org.nz or visit www.glaucoma.org.nz

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