Saving Vision by Promoting the Availability for Eye Care
EyeCare America and Time Banking for New Brunswick

Tag Words: Eyes, Vision, Health Care, TimeBank, EyeCare America, Eye Diseases, Glaucoma

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Summary: Many elders in the US do not receive the proper attention to eye care as they need. A problem that may occur is that people may not have the insurance coverage to visit an eye doctor. There are many organizations that help people in this situation, such as EyeCare America. The program works for the elderly or for those who have an increased risk for glaucoma by referring them to an eye doctor. At the present time, there are no volunteer ophthalmologists in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Another organization that services people without the worry of money is TimeBanks USA. For our service project, we will recruit volunteer Ophthalmologists for EyeCare America. Additionally, we sign up doctors for the TimeBank. Since Rutgers is located in Middlesex County, we will focus our attention to New Brunswick, NJ and the Middlesex County TimeBank.

Part 1 - Prevalence of Eye Diseases

Introduction (JT)

Vision is one of our most valued senses. We rely on it extensively, often as our first and most dependable sense for information. However, we often take it for granted and think little of it until there is a problem. A problem across the country is the availability of eye health care. As we age, our eyes do as well. For example, with age, the lens in our eyes become less and less flexible impacting its efficiency in receiving stimulations. This is when eye problems occur and a visit to a doctor is necessary. However, not everyone can afford to see an ophthalmologists or the care they need due to insurance issues. A solution to this problem involves non-profit organizations such as EyeCare America. This organization specializes in helping people over the age 65 or older or for those who have an increased risk for glaucoma (1). It is especially important to help the elderly since many common eye diseases occur at that age and insurance may not fulfill proper coverage. In this investigation, we will go into more detail about what causes eye diseases and why it is so important to see an eye doctor.

World Wide Averages & Prevention (PM)

The key to treating these eye diseases is to detect them early. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 80% of visually impaired cases could have been avoided. This means that out of the estimated 285 million worldwide cases of visual impairment, up to 228 million of them were preventable or are treatable. Several eye problems have few or negligible symptoms in their early stages which makes it easy to put off and ignore but these symptoms may be key in detecting and preventing future complications. Regular eye exams detect progressive diseases such as glaucoma which can result in loss of vision but is easily ignored because of its few symptoms early on. There are several symptoms that suggest a problem in vision in which the patient should seek medical attention or see their doctor right away.
Symptoms to watch out for include flashing lights, loss of vision, eye pain, injury, or discomfort, red eye and blurred vision. All of these symptoms can be signs of a serious eye complication but are easy to attribute to a passing or everyday occurrence. The problem may lie with the healthcare system where it is easy to try to seek in home solutions or wait a few days to see if the symptoms pass to avoid expensive visits and treatments whereas in other countries it is not unheard of for people to seek medical attention on a weekly basis (2).

Prevalence (PM)
All of these diseases are linked with age and as long as the patient has regular eye exams these diseases can be preventable. In fact, it has been estimated that among all cases of blindness in the world, people over 60 years of age contribute to 58% of these cases. And in the US specifically, 21% of people over 65 years of age have some degree of vision impairment, which makes up about 7.3 million people. The most common causes of blindness are these age related diseases like cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration, all of which are diseases that can be prevented or treated as long as it is detected early. The importance of regular exams is just to detect symptoms for these diseases, preventing them depends on active intervention by the patient. Besides age are other risk factors for these diseases including diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. For example, diabetic retinopathy is damage to the blood vessels supplying the retina due to diabetes and can lead to blindness. Diseases like these make it important for the patient to take care of themselves as well as getting regular check ups. In general, a healthier lifestyle is paired with healthy eyesight. The onset of these diseases can potentially be delayed with healthy living such as exercise directly affecting the onset of macular degeneration and also improves the patient’s overall health and condition. When their overall health improves, they indirectly reduce the chances of developing other diseases such as those linked with cholesterol and blood pressure (3).

Why People Don’t Go to Doctors (PM)
Although the majority of these diseases are preventable so long as people get regular checkups and introduce necessary lifestyle interventions, the diseases still occur and affect a wide range of Americans. In fact, out of the estimate population of Americans which is about 300 million, roughly 23 million suffer from cataracts, 2.3 million have glaucoma, and an additional 2 million have age related macular degeneration. Roughly 9% of the American population suffers from an age related disease. Perhaps even more shocking is that seniors over 65 make up 12% of the American population. This means that seniors without age related diseases make up only 3% of the population and that three fourths of seniors in America do suffer from at least one of these age related diseases. These statistics only include the age related diseases and do not take into account the lifestyle related diseases such as diabetic retinopathy and dry eye, both of which are also preventable if the necessary precautions were taken earlier. Diabetic retinopathy is of particular concern due to the rising number of diabetic Americans and obesity. So why are these preventable, debilitating diseases so common? The problem is that the necessary precautions aren’t being taken simply because the patient is unaware that they are even at risk. This stems from the problem in America’s healthcare and the fact that people are able to ignore their health. A 2010 census finds that there has been almost a 20% drop in doctor visits within a decade. The reasons for this are currently unclear but it may be linked to the change in demographics, the problem with the uninsured and America’s healthcare system in general, and the rising dependence on technology. The change in demographics moved away from the a large working class of older citizens who require more frequent check ups to a smaller younger working class who don’t require as much care. Concerning the insurance problem, there has been
a rise in uninsured workers who simply cannot afford regular check ups, and the number of uninsured workers has risen from 17% to 22% within the decade. Compared to insured workers, only 1/4th of uninsured workers would go to the doctor even once compared to the insured workers which has about 3/4th of workers receiving check ups or treatment. Uninsured workers are more likely to use alternative treatments and self diagnose the immediate problems while completely unnoticing the progressive diseases such as the age related eye diseases. Finally, the reliance on technology has caused people to hold doctors and medical practitioners in lower esteem. Now patients are able to self diagnose and seek out home remedies or alternative treatments which, similar to the uninsured case, can allow progressive diseases to go by unnoticed. Possibly the biggest reason for patients seeking out alternative or home remedies is simply the cost and expenses of seeing a medical practitioner. And with cost as a concern, it becomes easier for people to put off seemingly less important exams such as the eye exam for the sake of saving money (4).

**Burden of Living with Low Vision (JT)**

Low vision can be a traumatic experience. This occurs in patients with age-related macular degeneration so that even with glasses, medicine, or surgery, vision is still blurry and not clear. Normal activities such as reading, shopping, and watching television are a difficult struggle. Many of these patients rely on magnifying glass just to be able to read their mail. It is very difficult to deal with adds challenges to one’s life. Besides the United States, low vision occurs all over the world. For example, in Nigeria, there is a lack of effective eye care, therefore many people who have eye diseases do not get the proper treatment. Since they cannot see, they cannot work. With low vision, not only are their lives more difficult, but they fall into a lower social and economic class (5). This is very disheartening and there are groups and organizations around the world trying to promote eye care and the prevention of blindness.

Vision loss and eye disease come with a cost. In 2013, the Prevent Blindness organization estimated the total economic burden of vision problems of people age 65 and older in the United States was $77,280,000. This includes direct costs of diagnosis, medical vision aids and devices, assistance programs, and indirect costs of productivity loss and long-term care. There are no quick fixes to eye disease. Most require long term care and treatment for the rest of the patient’s life. The cost of medical care and treatments continue to rise and this adds to the total economic burden of eye disorders. Preventing vision disorders can save sight and money (6).

**Age Related Diseases (PM)**

Problems that may arise due to complications in vision may be refractive errors, glaucoma, cataracts, and macular degeneration. Refractive errors are commonplace and easily treated with glasses or contacts, or if one’s willing they can also get corrective eye surgery so that they no longer require corrective lenses. These complications are not easily preventable and usually have more to do with genetics than a person’s lifestyle. Glaucoma is a more serious disease but one that is preventable if caught early on. Glaucoma is the buildup of pressure due to the fluid in the eyes which are known as the aqueous humour. This is a serious neuropathologic disease that if left untreated can cause damage to the optic nerve. If the patient sustains damage to the optic nerves, then they will no longer be able to transfer the information that the retinas generate to the visual cortex and the patient will no longer be able to interpret light into visual images, resulting in loss of vision and blindness. The consequences of glaucoma are tragic but luckily they are preventable, especially if caught early. Another serious disease is cataracts which affects the lens in the eye and is the most common cause of blindness in the general
population. The lens become clouded most commonly due to biological aging due to the proteins in the lens degrading and degenerating to produce different proteins that obstruct vision instead of letting it pass. Age related cataracts can be exacerbated by diseases associated with a poor lifestyle such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Other less common causes of cataracts include trauma, radiation, genetics, skin diseases, parasitic diseases, drug use, and medications (7). The clouding of lens causes blurry or tinted vision due to reduced light transmission onto the retinas. It is usually age related but it is partially preventable with lifestyle interventions, and it is also treatable with surgery intended to replace the clouded lens with artificial ones. The leading cause of blindness in the elderly in the US is macular degeneration. Macular degeneration is gradual damage to the macula, receptors in the retina. This causes a blurred vision which can end up blinding the patient. There is no cure for macular degeneration but it is also preventable and progression can be slowed with proper treatment (8).

Glaucoma (JT)
One of the leading causes of blindness is glaucoma. As stated previously, glaucoma is a buildup of pressure in the eye that can cause damage to the optic nerve. Glaucoma affects the peripheral vision first. The disease progresses slowly and if left untreated, one can lose peripheral vision completely. There are two main types of glaucoma. First, the most common type of glaucoma is open-angle glaucoma. This occurs when the drainage canals of the eye, located at the angle of the eye where the cornea and iris meet, become clogged. Fluid cannot drain out of the eye which causes a backup of fluid and a buildup of pressure. It slowly and gradually causes a loss of vision. A second type of glaucoma is narrow angle glaucoma, also known as angle-closure glaucoma. This occurs when the angle that the fluid drains out of the eye becomes progressively smaller or in some cases, closed. As a result of the narrow or closed angle, the fluid cannot get to the drainage canals. This causes a buildup of fluid and increases pressure of the eye. It is a change in the size and position of the iris that causes this change in the angle. This type of glaucoma is less common than open-angle. The first warning signs for glaucoma are in the pressure of the eye. High pressure would cause someone to be a suspect. An effective way to test for glaucoma is from a gonioscopy. This is a test that looks at the angle of the eye where the iris and cornea meet. It gives the doctor a clear image of the angle which will help in his or her diagnosis. A dilated eye exam is also very important. This allows the doctor to see the optic nerve can assess if there is any damage to it. These tests are critical for an early diagnosis and careful evaluation of the optic nerve over time is needed. There is no cure for glaucoma however, there are drugs to help reduce to pressure in the eye (9).

Cataracts (JT)
As we age, the lens in our eyes become less flexible and more opaque. When the lens becomes too cloudy, it affects vision. This is known as cataracts. Cataracts are the leading cause of blurred vision. The disease starts out as blurry vision that glasses cannot fix. If left untreated the disease progresses to badly blurred vision that the person becomes legally blind. The absolute cause of cataracts is unknown however, it is suspected to be from a buildup of protein on the lens. There are other factors such as UV rays, air pollution, and side of effects of drugs that may lead to cataracts. In serious cases, the treatment for cataracts requires surgery. An ophthalmologist removes the lens and replaces it with a new, artificial one. The operation is quick and usually successful (10).
Macular Degeneration (JT)
The most devastating leading cause of blindness in the United States is Age-Related Macular Degeneration (11). In this case, the macula, or center of the retina where a high amount of rods and cones are located, is damaged. The disease progresses slowly. First, center vision becomes blurry. The patient might see floating spots or flashes of lights. If left untreated, center vision is gone completely. There are two types of macular degeneration: dry and wet. In the dry type, the retina starts to thin and there are deposits of waste in the retina. This progresses slowly and minimally. The dry type is most common however, as of yet, no are no approved forms of treatment or cure. This is one reason why macular degeneration is so devastating. Loss of central vision can occur but all the doctor can do is try to slow the process down with nutritional supplements. The wet type is rarer than the dry type. It occurs when abnormal blood vessels grow beneath the retina toward the macula, possibly damaging it by leaking or bleeding. This is the most severe form of macular degeneration as it can cause rapid loss of central vision. Symptoms include blurred, wavy, or distorted central vision. Early diagnosis is critical for the wet form because if it is left untreated, it can cause serious vision problems rather quickly. Macular degeneration can be genetic and risks are increased in those who smoke. Proper prevention includes annual eye exams and a healthy diet with good amounts of Vitamin A and antioxidants (12).

Diabetic Retinopathy (JT)
Unquestionably, those with diabetes have to be sure to check the health of their eyes every year. Diabetes can cause serious damage the retina and lead to blindness. There are tiny blood vessels in the retina that nourish it. In patients with diabetes, prolonged periods of high blood sugar put these blood vessels at risk. They can leak fluid into the retina, causing the retina to swell. A swollen retina will lead to blurred vision. This type of diabetic retinopathy is called Non-proliferative diabetic retinopathy. A more serious type of diabetic retinopathy is Proliferative diabetic retinopathy. In this case, the retina is oxygen deprived. Therefore, new blood vessels in the eye grow to try and improve it. However, these new blood vessels are fragile and grow abnormally from the retina into the vitreous. As a result, they can leak and cause bleeding or scarring of the retina. A very serious possible result is a detachment of the retina. Also, the possibility of glaucoma increases. Of course, if these diseases are untreated, they can lead to blindness. Control and monitoring of blood sugar levels are important to prevent these diseases. Treatment may include laser surgery to stop the leakage of blood and fluid into the retina (13).

Other Eye Care Programs (PM)
Fortunately, the rise in prevalence of eye related diseases has not gone unnoticed and there are several volunteer organizations around to help inform and treat the public. One of the organizations is EyeCare America which has established the Seniors EyeCare program which can help seniors who qualify by having volunteer ophthalmologists provide free eye exams and help raise awareness of age related eye diseases (14). And there are several other organizations with a similar interest in helping raise awareness and facilitating access to problem free vision. Among these organizations are the Lions Club International, New Eyes for the Needy, Vision USA, Mission Cataract USA, and the National Eye Institute. The Lions Club International has established a program that provides free sight screenings for kids and provide glasses while also
helping combat diseases that cause vision problems in endemic areas (15). The diseases include trachoma, river blindness, and measles. Vision USA has a program similar to EyeCare America’s with a focus on helping the low income families. This includes people that are uninsured and cannot afford regular eye exams on their own and can help pacify the problem of the uninsured receiving less treatment (16). New Eyes for the Needy goes around the world to provide eyeglasses to people who would otherwise be unable to afford them. New Eyes doesn’t have and restrictions and helps people regardless of age, income, or other limiting qualifications (17). Mission Cataract USA provides free cataract surgery for those who would not be able to afford it on their own, and cataracts are the leading cause of blindness in America today. And then the National Eye Institute provides financial aid for eye exams or can direct people to programs that are able to help them. With all of these eye care programs, we hope to see a drop in the number of cases which are treatable and preventable.

Part 2 - EyeCare America and Time Banking

EyeCare America (JT)

For our service project, we will be recruiting volunteer ophthalmologists for EyeCare America for New Brunswick, NJ. EyeCare America is a public service program that helps US citizens find eye care through volunteer ophthalmologists without the worry of cost. Currently, there are no volunteers for this program in New Brunswick. Our mission is to change that so citizens of New Brunswick can receive proper eye care. The program works for those who do not have an ophthalmologist and do not belong to an HMO, or those with Veterans Administration that does not cover vision care. This also includes those who are age 65 or older or for those who have an increased risk for glaucoma. EyeCare America can provide up to one year of care for those eligible at no out of pocket cost.

Signing up for EyeCare America is easy for both the volunteers and patients. For the volunteer ophthalmologists, they would visit the EyeCare America website and fill out a volunteer form. Patients will then be referred to them through the organization. If the patient has health care but it does not cover the full amount, the ophthalmologist will be paid that partial amount. If the patient has no health care, the ophthalmologist will treat the patient pro bono. The benefits for the volunteers include helping those in serious need of eye care, improving community connections, public recognition of volunteer service, and the rewarding feeling of using your vigorous training and skills to save someone’s sight. Signing up is easy for the patient too. They would visit the EyeCare America website and at the top of the home page there is a link to the referral application. They then fill out their information in to see if they qualify for the service. Qualification involves age, medical insurance, and eye health. If they do qualify, patients will receive the name and phone number of the closest volunteer ophthalmologist. All that is left to do is call the ophthalmologist and make an appointment.

Time Bank (JT)

Additionally, we will discuss with the doctors about the service project of TimeBank. TimeBanking is a way for people to help the community by exchanging their services without the currency of money. When a service is complete, the volunteer earns time credits which can be used to reciprocate any service that the person may need in the future. TimeBanking is a
nation wide service and have a credible website that makes it easy to volunteer. Since Rutgers is located in Middlesex County, we will focus our attention to the Middlesex County TimeBank. Eye health care is important to save people from losing their vision. EyeCare America and Middlesex County TimeBank can assist people in receiving proper treatment and care (18).

**Our Efforts (JT PM)**

To recruit eye doctors in the area, we first reached out the EyeCare America. We sent them information about Timebanking and discussed our plans. EyeCare America was enthusiastic about helping us and they agreed to send brochures so we could provide literature to the eye doctors. Unfortunately, the brochures were lost in the mail and never arrived. Instead, we used downloadable brochures which were sent from EyeCare America and printed them out. After getting EyeCare America’s approval, we worked on methods to help spread information about both timebanking and EyeCare America. To our University paper the Targum, we submitted an article to help raise awareness about EyeCare America and our approach to recruiting local ophthalmologists. Part of the approach involved informing the ophthalmologist about the timebanking opportunity as an added incentive to joining EyeCare America. This mention was also included to raise awareness about timebanking to any potential volunteer without being restricted to ophthalmologists only. An additional method we used to help spread timebanking information was to design a brochure that we could distribute while visiting the clinics. Using a basis for a brochure provided by Professor Fagan, we modeled and designed an informative brochure about timebanking in our area that we could distribute to anyone working in the clinic. Additionally, we printed out a volunteer form for the doctors and a description of what patients were at an increased risk for glaucoma. All together, we went to the doctors with a package which included an EyeCare America brochure, an at risk for glaucoma sheet, volunteer form and a Timebanking brochure. Below is a script of the basic ideas we said when visiting doctors.

“Hello good morning my name is Joe Tulipani and this is Paul Malaran. We are Rutgers students working with a referral organization called EyeCare America. It is a referral organization that helps seniors get eye care that is needed. We are looking for physicians to join the referral database. How it works is the patient goes online to EyeCare America's website to see if they qualify for the program. If they do they are sent the doctors information to call and make an appointment. Basically the organization guides seniors to the closet doctor available. It is a great opportunity to get referrals and your name out there while helping seniors. Also, we are looking for members to join Middlesex County Time Bank. This is an organization that helps strengthen the community because services are exchanged with time instead of money. Each member has a skill that they can offer and receive in return. If we could just have a minute to meet with the doctor to explain more about the program or we can leave information and come back another time.”

We started in New Brunswick. The first place we visited was NJ Retina. Here we met some difficulty as the doctors are specialists and they can only receive patients through referrals from other ophthalmologists. A person cannot just look them up in the phonebook and decide to go there. We still gave them the brochure and ask them to inform the doctors about the program. Unfortunately, they were not interested in time banking. Next in New Brunswick, we went to some optometrists to inform them about time banking. EyeCare America only works with
ophthalmologists so we just informed them about time banking. They seemed interested but did not want to sign up right away. They said they would look at it at a later date. A problem we encountered in New Brunswick is that most of the doctors are specialists who work in the hospital and only work through referrals. Next, we went to Highland Park to Brunswick Eye Associates and Ophthalmology Surgical Associates. At Brunswick Eye Associates, we had to chance to speak to a doctor there, Dr. Hathaway. However, she was not interested in either program. She informed us that the office was actually closing down, but believed that another doctor who worked there was already apart of EyeCare America, Dr. Gordon.

Additionally, there were troubles when recruiting optometrists for the timebank. While discussing EyeCare America, we also spoke with some optometrists to see if they would be interested. However, most if not all were either uninterested or didn’t believe that the timebank was a viable option. This may be due to the recent appearance of timebanks in our area so it is still being validated as a legitimate option that the doctors would currently spectate on until it becomes commonly accepted. One ophthalmologist even commented that he didn’t have time for this, which brings up another complaint. Because these people are doctors, they are already helping people and receiving a lot of money while doing so. For their skills, these doctors are already receiving higher wages than other skills so the exchange aspect probably didn’t appeal to them, and because they are doctors who already help people, the volunteering aspect didn’t seem to appeal to them as well. Perhaps recruiting doctors for timebanks can be revisited after it has become a more common and recognizable program.

Table 1. A list of ophthalmologists in the New Brunswick area and Middlesex County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Fine</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 220-1600</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@njretina.com">info@njretina.com</a></td>
<td>Retina Vitreous Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Friedman</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 220-1600</td>
<td></td>
<td>Retina Vitreous Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Green</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 220-1600</td>
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<td>Retina Vitreous Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Keyser</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 220-1600</td>
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<td>Retina Vitreous Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Prenner</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 220-1600</td>
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<td>Retina Vitreous Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Roth</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 220-1600</td>
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<td>Retina Vitreous Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Shah</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 220-1600</td>
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<td>Retina Vitreous Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Wheatley</td>
<td>Edison</td>
<td>(732) 235-6333</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Yarian</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 220-1600</td>
<td></td>
<td>Retina Vitreous Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Gordon</td>
<td>Highland Park</td>
<td>(732) 545-0362</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ophthalmology Surgical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Patel</td>
<td>Edison</td>
<td>(732) 985-5009</td>
<td>*in site contact available</td>
<td>Patel Eye Associates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Shah</td>
<td>Edison</td>
<td>(732) 985-5009</td>
<td>*in site contact available</td>
<td>Patel Eye Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Bennett-Phillips</td>
<td>North Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 422-8400</td>
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<td>Phillips Eye Consultants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Shamim</td>
<td>Somerset*</td>
<td>(732) 745-4844</td>
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<td>Shamim Eye Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Felton</td>
<td>Somerset*</td>
<td>732-565-9550</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Princeton Eye Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Glass</td>
<td>Highland</td>
<td>732.828.5190</td>
<td>*in site contact available</td>
<td>Brunswick Eye Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park</td>
<td>Dr. Grewal</td>
<td>Somerset*</td>
<td>(732) 565-1500</td>
<td>Somerset Ophthalmology Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Hathaway</td>
<td>Highland Park</td>
<td>(732) 828-5190</td>
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<td>Brunswick Eye Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Agarwal</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>(732) 202-0393</td>
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<td>Comprehensive Eye Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Angrist</td>
<td>Somerset*</td>
<td>(732) 828-5900</td>
<td>732-246-1050</td>
<td>Somerset Eye Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Mobin-Uddin</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>732-546-3910</td>
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<td>The Glaucoma Institute</td>
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*Somerset is not in Middlesex County.

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**Figure 1. EyeCare America Literature**

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**How can you say “thank you” with a gift of sight?**

EyeCare America’s Tribute for Sight program provides an opportunity for individuals to recognize family, a friend, a colleague, their ophthalmologist or anyone else who has made a difference in your life.

**Giving is easy!**

Tribute gifts of any amount are appreciated and help EyeCare America continue to serve communities in need. Should you have questions about making a donation, please contact our Development office at (866) 425-9638 or email devinfo@eyeusa.org.

To make a secure gift online, please visit www.eyecareamerica.org and click “Donate.”

EyeCare America is co-sponsored by the Knights Templar Eye Foundation Inc., with additional support provided by

- American Ophthalmological Societies
- American Glaucoma Society
- American Society of Retina Specialists
- American Macula Society
- Macula Society Foundation Inc.
- Retina Society
EyeCare America, the public service program of the Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, provides eye care to medically underserved seniors and those who are at increased risk for eye disease.

Our success is made possible by a corps of 7,000 volunteer ophthalmologists dedicated to serving their communities, and charitable contributions from those committed to preventing blindness.

More than 60% of the care made available through EyeCare America is provided at no out-of-pocket cost to the patients.

For more information or to see if you qualify, please visit our online referral center at www.eye-careamerica.org.

By age 65, one in three Americans has some form of vision-threatening eye disease, but many people do not know it. EyeCare America ensures that every senior has access to medical eye care and promotes annual, dilated eye exams. The program makes accessibility to eye exams, provide education, materi's and facilitates access to medical and surgical eye care.

EyeCare America is designed for US citizens or legal residents who do not belong to an HMO or have eye care through the Veteran’s Administration. To be eligible, the program an individual should fall into one of the two categories below:

1. Those who are age 65, or older and who have not seen an Eye M.D. in three or more years may be eligible to receive a comprehensive, medicare eye exam and up to one year of care at no out-of-pocket cost for any disease diagnosed during the initial exam. Volunteer ophtalmologists will work co-payments and patient deductibles, accepting Medicare and/or other insurance reimbursement as payments in full, patients without insurance receive this care at no charge.

2. If you are not eligible for the above care, those determined to be at increased risk for glaucoma (by age, race and family history) and have not had an eye exam in 12 months or more may be eligible to receive a free stenoscope eye exam if they are uninsured. The initiation of treatment is provided, if deemed necessary by the doctor during the exam. Those eligible with insurance will be billed for the exam and are responsible for any co-payments.

Whether or not website visitors are eligible for a referral, EyeCare America also offers free brochures, resources and medication assistance information online.

To see if you, a loved one, or friend is eligible, please visit our online referral center at www.eye-careamerica.org.

“EyeCare America is a miracle, a gift from heaven. It saved my sight. It was not for EyeCare America, I probably would have been able to live this way, but when I was diagnosed with a cancer 15 years ago and had become completely blind in my right eye.

They removed my cataract. Again, I am so grateful to all that made this possible. Sincerely,

Sandra

EyeCare America Letters From Grateful Patient!
STOP the
"Sneak thief of sight"
in its tracks!

Glaucoma is an eye disease that can cause vision loss. But many people don’t even know they have it. That’s because there are often no warning signs. Detecting and treating glaucoma early is the best thing you can do to prevent blindness.

EyeCare America helps prevent blindness from glaucoma. This program informs people about risk factors and provides access to glaucoma eye exams.

You may qualify for an eye exam at no cost, if you do not have insurance. To find out if you are eligible:

VISIT
Our Online Referral Center
www.eyecareamerica.org

Knowing if you are at risk is the first step in saving your sight! (See other side)

A picture that looks clear today... Would look like this in the advanced stages of glaucoma.
To find out if you may be at risk for glaucoma, take this simple test.

My Glaucoma Risk

Circle only one score in each category. Add them up to find out your risk level.

1. **Family History**
   - My parent or child has glaucoma 2
   - My brother or sister has glaucoma 4
   - My parent and brother or sister have 4
   - There is no known glaucoma in my family 0

2. **Race**
   - I am white/Caucasian 1
   - I am Hispanic/Latino 2
   - I am black/African American 3

3. **Age**
   - I am younger than 40 years old 0
   - I am 40-49 years old 1
   - I am 50-59 years old 2
   - I am 60 or older 3

Add the circled number from each category. Put your total here:

- If your score is 4 or more, you are at increased risk for glaucoma. Get a glaucoma exam right away.
- No matter what your score is, have a glaucoma eye exam every one to two years if you are age 65 or older.

You also have a greater risk for glaucoma if you:
   - Are very near-sighted
   - Use steroid medications
   - Have been told you have high eye pressure
   - Have had past eye injuries

_EyeCare America is co-sponsored by the Knights Templar Eye Foundation Inc., with additional support provided by Alcon. EyeCare America is endorsed by state ophthalmological societies, the American Glaucoma Society, the American Society of Retina Specialists, the Macula Society, the Macula Society Foundation Inc., and the Retina Society._
Volunteer Enrollment Form

Ophthalmologists are encouraged to volunteer for ALL of the following, please check all that apply:

☐ I volunteer to provide a comprehensive, medical eye exam to ECA referred seniors (65 or older) and care for up to one year for any disease diagnosed during the initial exam—at no out-of-pocket cost to ECA patients. I will accept Medicare and/or other insurance reimbursement as payment in full, waiving co-payments and/or unmet deductibles as provided for by ECA’s waiver issued by the HHS Office of the Inspector General. ECA patients without insurance receive care at no charge. I agree to contact ECA if I find a patient needs to see a subspecialist or care I am unable to provide.

☐ I volunteer to provide a glaucoma eye exam and initiate treatment, if deemed necessary, to ECA referred patients (of any age) who are determined to be at increased risk for glaucoma. Patients with insurance will be billed and are responsible for any co-payments. Patients without insurance receive this care at no charge.

☐ I volunteer to provide care for ECA re-referred patients who need to receive retinal care unable to be provided by the original referred doctor. Patient care is the same as above care for seniors. I will accept Medicare and/or other insurance reimbursement as payment in full; uninsured patients receive care at no charge.

ECA volunteers agree to see no more than 15 ECA patients per fiscal year (4/1 – 3/31) for each of the above selections.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ____________
Print Name Clearly: ___________________________ AAO Member ID# ____________
My signature indicates that I have read and agree to the conditions of participation outlined above.

I volunteer to provide care at the following practice location(s).

First office location:

Business Name __________________________________________
Number/Street __________________________________________
City: __________ State: ___ Zip Code: __________ Contact Person: __________
Phone: (_____) ______ Fax: (_____) ______ Office e-mail: __________
Languages Spoken: __________

2nd office location:

Business Name __________________________________________
Number/Street __________________________________________
City: __________ State: ___ Zip Code: __________ Contact Person: __________
Phone: (_____) ______ Fax: (_____) ______ Office e-mail: __________

Please add any additional offices on the backside or call our toll-free staff line 877-887-6327

EyeCare America | www.eyecareamerica.org | toll-free 1-877-887-6327 | pubserv@aoa.org
I’d like to submit a post for your consideration in hopes of publishing it in your online newsletter. If it interests you and would like to learn more about it, you can contact me at this email. Thanks for your time and consideration and I hope we can keep in touch.

I recently saw an estimate by the World Health Organization that suggests that there are 285 million people in the world who are visually impaired. Although this is a staggering number, I was even more surprised to see that an estimated 80% of these cases were preventable. Almost 228 million people with diminished vision or blindness could have maintained their vision if the impairment was treated or prevented. As a consequence of underestimating the importance of eye care, people neglect regular eye exams and preventable diseases go unnoticed until it is too late and people lose one of their most basic senses.

These diseases tend to develop over the years and afflict more elderly patients. One organization that realizes the importance of vision and regular eye exams is EyeCare America which runs a program to raise awareness of age related eye diseases and make eye care more accessible. Their program Seniors EyeCare Program provides free eye exams to seniors who do not have access to ophthalmologists in their health care. The program runs on local volunteer ophthalmologists who accept referrals and treat seniors who may not be able to access eye care on their own. This is a great program that assists those who are underserved from volunteers willing to spare their time and resources to strengthen their community. This only makes it more surprising that there are currently no volunteers for this program in the New Brunswick area.

To compensate for this, we propose to contact local ophthalmologists and see if they are willing to help start up an EyeCare America program in our area. And as an added incentive, we’ll inform them of the local Timebanks that reward volunteer’s time with favors from other members. Timebanking is a relatively old concept, yet it is still an unfamiliar concept to many despite its success in countries such as Japan and China. By adding the incentive of joining the newly established Middlesex timebank NJ Strong, local ophthalmologists will be able to volunteer their time to help seniors and also receive a favor in return from other volunteers involved in the program. We believe this will be able to help start up an EyeCare America program in our area and with your help, we can further raise awareness of both these charitable programs.

Paul Malaran
Rutgers University Student majoring in Biological Sciences

April 2 JT Home News Tribune  hntletters@mycentraljersey.com
To the Editor:
Please consider publishing this letter in the Home News Tribune. Thank you.
Joseph Tulipani
<redacted>

When was the last time you had your eyes examined? Regular eye exams are more important than you may think. Besides correcting your vision, eye doctors, known as Ophthalmologists or Optometrists, check your overall eye health. Diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol can have effects on the eye. Awareness of these diseases in their beginning stages can play a critical role in treatment. Glaucoma, Cataracts, and Macular Degeneration are all potentially blinding eye diseases that risks increase with age. It is especially important for people over the age of 40 to start having their eyes checked for these diseases. Unfortunately, many people who need the care cannot afford it. One organization that can help is EyeCare America. They will help those in need find the right doctor without the worry of money. The
program works for those who are age 65 or older or for those who have an increased risk for glaucoma. This program recruits volunteer ophthalmologists to offer their service. Currently, there are no volunteer ophthalmologists in the New Brunswick area! That is something my team is trying to change to improve the community. We are currently working to add volunteer ophthalmologists for this program. Save your vision and see an eye doctor every year! For more information please visit www.eyecareamerica.org and see if you qualify.

Joseph Tulipani
School of Environment and Biological Sciences
Senior Majoring in Biological Sciences
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