

WORLD SIGHT DAY

Vision health awareness – maximizing the potential of Canadians to benefit from advances in ophthalmology



The simulation photos above compare a normal field of vision with advanced-stage glaucoma. Glaucoma, which affects the optic nerve's ability to transmit images to the brain, has no symptoms until vision damage has occurred. Regular eye exams are crucial for detecting the disease. **SUPPLIED**

IN THE EARLY NINETIES, PEOPLE RECEIVING A DIAGNOSIS OF WET MACULAR DEGENERATION WOULD HAVE LEARNED TWO THINGS:

their vision would get worse and there was no treatment available. The only option was a referral to a low-vision specialist to discuss how to function with dwindling sight.

Today's outlook is very different, says Dr. Phil Hooper, chair of the Council on Advocacy at the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. For the majority of people with wet macular degeneration, devastating vision loss can already be prevented. For dry macular degeneration, treatments are evolving and now entering the clinical trial stage.

Improved vision health outcomes for people with macular degeneration, which affects 1.4 million Canadians, are due to "a shift in our ability to treat this disease," says Dr. Hooper. "It is one of the areas where we've seen huge advances over the last decades."

Other areas with significant forward momentum include refractive surgery, cataract surgery and cornea transplantation, along with the ability to earlier detect and better treat glaucoma, he explains.

Cataract surgery, for example, has become much safer and more predictable due to "improved techniques, equipment and lens implants for restoring the focus to the eye," says Dr. Hooper.

One of the most commonly performed surgical procedures worldwide, cataract surgery enables many to retain their vision and independence, says Dr. Yvonne Buys, president of the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. Yet the selection of the power for the lens

implant in cataract surgery is not an exact science, which means that, currently, patients may still require glasses afterwards.

"However, there is work on a light adjustable lens, which could be safely and non-invasively reshaped with a laser after surgery to correct for these errors and negate the need for glasses after cataract surgery," she says. "This could be revolutionary."

Also benefiting from an evolution in drugs plus technology enabling earlier detection and better treatment are people with glaucoma, a group of eye conditions with damage to the optic nerve that can result in irreversible vision loss and affects more than 500,000 Canadians, says Dr. Hooper.

A number of newly introduced devices and procedures, often referred to as minimally invasive glaucoma procedures (MIGS), may result in greater safety and faster healing than traditional glaucoma procedures, says Dr. Buys. "This is exciting for both the patient and the surgeon; however, the outcomes of these procedures in slowing disease progression remain unproven."

The results of new therapies and procedures often take some time to evaluate, says Dr. Buys, who believes a key barrier to all Canadians benefiting from advances in ophthalmology is "the increased cost of innovation."

Variations in health care coverage translate to different realities for patients across the country. "There can be a significant cost to new drugs and therapies for patients without supplemental insurance, depending on where

they live," says Dr. Hooper.

At the same time, a number of provincial governments have delisted routine eye examinations for those between the ages of 20 and 65 unless they have a known eye disease, says Dr. Buys. "The problem is that many people with early eye disease are not aware they have an issue until the disease is advanced, and, in many cases, the vision loss cannot be reversed."

Early detection is important, agrees Dr. Hooper. "People need

“
...many people with early eye disease are not aware they have an issue until the disease is advanced.

Dr. Yvonne Buys
President of the Canadian Ophthalmological Society

to be aware of the risks for eye disease, including aging or diabetes, where timely intervention can prevent vision loss. Having regular eye examinations can help to make sure Canadians don't miss out on opportunities."

Dr. Buys adds, "I hope World Sight Day will encourage Canadians to think about their eye health."

More information at
www.cos-sco.ca.

WITH A GUIDE DOG BY YOUR SIDE

If you feel that getting around in a city can be challenging, imagine how intimidating this task must be for someone with a vision impairment. That's why Sharon Brant of Scarborough, Ontario, is grateful for her guide dog. "Every business day, my guide dog and I navigate the Kennedy Subway Station and take the train downtown to my office," she says. "It's amazing that I can ask my dog to find steps or an escalator. She can also help me to find a seat on the public transit."

Guide dogs are often the difference between relying on someone with sight for assistance versus being independent. "In Canada, we are fortunate to have an organization that has trained guide dogs for over 35 years. Since it was founded in 1984, Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind has trained and provided more than



A guide dog leads his handler. **SUPPLIED**

870 guide dogs to Canadians who are blind and visually impaired," says Steven Doucette, the organization's events coordinator.

Guide dogs have one of the world's most difficult jobs for a dog. While "getting from point A to point B" may sound basic, most of the training is away from the dog's natural instincts, says Doucette. "They must learn that when the harness is on, there are certain behavioural expectations and they have to focus on the job at hand. However, they also get plenty of time to relax and play. Inside the house, they are just pet dogs and much-loved members of the family."

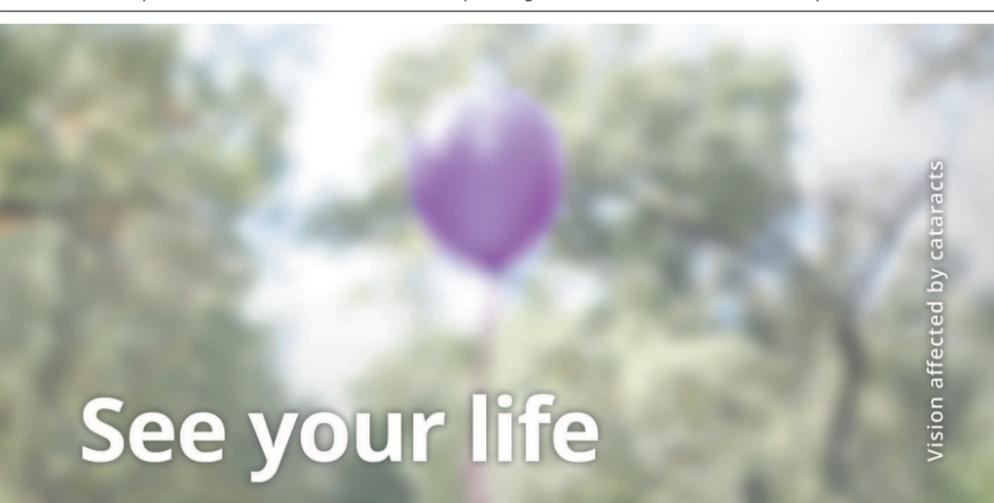
The dogs go through two years of training, since birth and within Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind's Breeding and Canine Development Program. Then it's time for the person to learn how to properly use a guide dog with a three-week residential

training course, says Doucette. All expenses are paid by the organization, which operates solely through donations.

Many clients establish a lifelong relationship with Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind and return for replacement dogs after their guide dogs retire.

Bryan Gutteridge of Chilliwack, B.C., has had several guide dogs. "A guide dog can help you lead a normal, productive life and have confidence travelling around with your guide dog at your side," he says, adding that there is a significant difference between using a guide dog for mobility rather than a long cane. "A guide dog is an obstacle avoider, while a long cane is an obstacle finder."

Visit www.guidedogs.ca or call (613) 692-7777.



Vision affected by cataracts

See your life



Normal Vision

the way it's meant to be seen.

A message from Canada's ophthalmologists — we are your eye physicians and surgeons.

SeeThePossibilities.ca



Canadian Société
Ophthalmologique canadienne
Société d'ophtalmologie

EYE PHYSICIANS | MÉDECINS ET CHIRURGIENS
AND SURGEONS | OPHTHALMOLOGISTES
OF CANADA | DU CANADA

Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind

We provide *freedom* to Canadians



In Canada, for Canadians since 1984



Donate online
www.guidedogs.ca