



## **Afraid of the Dark; Raising Awareness of Societies Each Year during World Glaucoma Week**

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### **Dear Editor-in-Chief**

#### ***A leading global public health issue***

As a leading global health issue, glaucoma is a multifactorial optic neuropathy defined by a typical acquired loss of retinal ganglion cells and a corresponding atrophy of the optic nerve. It is quickly becoming the chief cause of blindness, as the world's population continues to be older. Glaucoma affects millions of people globally each year, making it one of the prominent causes of blindness. Furthermore, one of the most common forms of this disease, primary angle closure glaucoma, acts as the principal cause of bilateral blindness (1-5).

According to data from one population-based survey, glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness, which accounts for 8% of blindness among the 39 million people who are blind or visually impaired worldwide (6). The number of individuals estimated to be bilaterally blind from glaucoma is expected to increase from 8.4 million in 2010 to 11.1 million by 2020. Nevertheless, these numbers represent just the tip of the iceberg, since there are many individuals with glaucoma who are at risk of blindness (7).

#### ***World Glaucoma Week***

Every year World Glaucoma Week (WGW) takes place for one week during the month of March. This is a joint global initiative of the World Glau-

coma Association (WGA) and the World Glaucoma Patients Association (WGPA). The main purpose of WGW is to promote awareness about glaucoma. During WGW there will be many discussions including those covering such topics as how glaucoma affects vision, and how the lives of patients and their families are affected. The WGW seeks assistance from both governmental and non-government organizations (NGOs) by organizing screenings at local hospitals, offer lectures at patient support groups, participate in discussions to speak, and answer questions, and ask the media to publish information and televise reports about glaucoma.

#### ***Essentials of international collaboration***

One of the highlights of WGW that deserves emphasis was the close collaboration between international agencies by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) that took place in order to assess and observe possible risk factors of glaucoma, as well as to encourage screening of the disease at its early stages. Clearly, NGOs play an important role in glaucoma education and prevention, because one of their primary contributions consists of offering consultation services to patients as well as their relatives, and providing support to visually impaired individuals.

These collaborations will prove a huge benefit for researchers because they will present new insights that can help to increase the life expectancy of visually impaired individuals worldwide, which will become part of many achievements of the VISION 2020 global initiative.

### **Importance of social support**

In conclusion, developments in advancement of sustained-release, gene or stem cell therapies will undoubtedly improve the outcome of anti-glaucomatous therapies. Ultimately, the availability of effective novel neuro-protective or ideally neuro-regenerative therapies will make it possible to treat and prevent blindness (8). However, what should not be neglected is the importance of social support to those who become blind because of glaucoma.

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