

Doctors keep an eye on health of seniors

By Tim Smith
staff writer

MANY SENIOR citizens suffer from eye diseases that could blind them. Medical professionals say blindness occurs 10 times more often among the elderly than among the general population.

Because many seniors think soaring health care costs would only leave them financially strapped, they learn to live with cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and other serious eye maladies.

For them, good sight has a price too high to pay.

To reach those over age 65 who are in need of urgent eye care, who have a limited income and who haven't seen an ophthalmologist in at least three years, a national program has been set up. It will allow them comprehensive eye examinations and necessary treatments (except hospitalization) at no out-of-pocket cost to senior adults.

The National Eye Care Project, co-sponsored by the Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and state ophthalmology societies, offers U.S. citizens over age 65 a toll-free line (1-800-222-EYES) for referrals to eye care specialists.

The program allows limited-income seniors comprehensive eye examinations and necessary treatment (except hospitalization) at no cost.

PRIVATE DONATIONS from businesses, residents and physicians themselves have financed the project. Most prominent among celebrities helping to establish the project was Bob Hope, who has glaucoma. Hope donated his time and energy in a promotional television commercial.

According to ophthalmologist Dr. Gordon Fishman, who shares offices in Farmington Hills and Birmingham with associate Dr. Andrea Benkoff, most seniors want and can afford eye care but don't know where to go.

"They have no one to ask with credibility, they have no one to trust," Fishman said. "And they're all alone, which makes things worse."

"This toll-free line provides them a place to go that has credibility for their eye care."

Fishman estimated that 95 percent of ophthalmologists in the

country are involved in the project. Also applauding the project was Robert Stephenson of Birmingham, who said seniors needing cataracts removed should do so quickly to improve their "quality of life."

"I THINK it's wonderful that they were able to develop this for the public," said Stephenson, who said he participated in a successful Michigan pilot program in 1984.

Besides Michigan, West Virginia and Washington also took part in the pilot, resulting in the national outreach program that was developed.

One of the local project spokesmen is Dr. Floyd S. Tukek of Southfield.

"This is an effort to find people who haven't received eye care for one reason or another, and give it to them," Tukek said.

"Physicians have agreed not to overcharge, and to take any insurance as full payment. If (patients) have no insurance, they will be seen without charge."

Tukek said that the program is as much education as eye care.

"We know that blindness occurs frequently above age 65, about 10 times as much," said Tukek. "Many times, that blindness can be prevented."

AGREEING WITH Tukek was Donna Seism, American Academy spokeswoman.

"This program is for people who dropped out of the eye care system, to get them back into the system and check for blinding diseases," Seism said.

"Some people don't even seek out eye care because they feel co-payments and deductibles will break them."

According to Seism, people seeking referrals should call the toll-free helpline. Referrals, which are tailored to the senior's specific needs and location, are then mailed to recipients within a month.

Seism said every effort will be made to match project patients



DAH DEAN/West photograph

Dr. Henry Spiro of Southfield is one of the physicians participating in a program to help senior citizens on a limited budget get eye care to prevent blindness. He is using a slit-

lamp microscope to examine the eyes of Elfrida Levinson of Bloomfield Township during a check-up after cataract surgery.

with doctors, "within distances that patients can travel."

Participating physicians arrange for other treatment, including surgery if necessary, and find out what hospitals may allow patients with more serious eye diseases to be treated at no cost.

THOUGH THE program lasts only until Dec. 31, Tukek said physicians may "continue to see patients under those same rules until some resolution of the problem is made."

Taking the concept one step further is Bloomfield Hills resident William D. Myers of the Michigan Eye Institute, who has offices in Southfield.

Myers will perform free cataract surgery on patients of any age, living in Oakland, Wayne, Macomb and Monroe counties who do not have insurance. The Southeast

Michigan Lions Club will be handling the screening of potential free-surgery patients.

In order to get the project message across, Seism said spokesmen will be making the rounds to senior centers and apartment complexes.

Extensive mailings will be sent to seniors, while public service announcements also will be made.

AGREEING THAT contact with the elderly is important is Maureen J. Miller, spokeswoman for The Cataract and Eye Care Institute, in Southfield. The institute is under the direction of Dr. Henry J. Spiro.

"The more publicity we get for the project, the more people who really need the care will be able to take advantage," Miller said.

"This isn't just an office visit. It goes much further than that," Miller said a cataract patient

without insurance benefits would have to spend anywhere from \$8,000 to \$9,000 per eye for total care. Included in that cost would be diagnosis, surgery, examinations and post-operative treatment.

Many other doctors throughout Michigan, like Thomas Millman in Rochester, are donating their time and resources to help needy seniors in their fight for sight.

BECAUSE SO any ophthalmologists are participating, individual eye doctors wouldn't feel much of a financial pinch or time drain, Fishman said.

"It doesn't overburden us if (referrals are) divided properly."

The doctors agree that the National Eye Care Project is a worthwhile one. But it's up to the seniors to take that first step toward improving their vision, and call the toll-free helpline.

Here's how to get help

Fighting diseases that could blind senior adults is the role of the National Eye Care Project.

Most Michigan ophthalmologists are donating their time and resources to help seniors strike out against glaucoma, cataracts and other eye ailments.

Seniors taking advantage of the program must be over 65 years of age, be United States citizens and have been without ophthalmological care for at least three years.

TO BE REFERRED to an eye doctor, seniors must call a toll-free helpline, 1-800-222-EYES.

There will be no out-of-pocket costs to seniors who qualify. Doctors have agreed to accept various insurances and will pick up the cost for patients who don't have insurance.

Comprehensive eye examinations will be given. If eye diseases are diagnosed, patients will be seen and treated until the problem is corrected.

inkwell

Inkwell provides news and information about Farmington area primary and secondary schools. The column appears monthly throughout the year as part of the Observer's "School Page." Send news items to: The School Page, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024. Include a telephone number where a contact person can be reached during the day.

COLLEGE BOUND

Nancy Lynn Enright of Farmington Hills has been accepted into Siena Heights College, beginning with the fall term.

She is a June graduate of Farmington Hills Mercy High School.

Amy Rauch, a 1988 Harrison High School graduate, has been admitted to the Honors College of Oakland University for the fall of 1988. She plans to major in journalism.

STUDENTS LAUDED

Harrison High School students who earned 4.0 grade point averages during both semesters of the 1985-86 school year were announced recently by Principal Clayton Graham. They include:

• 9th grade: Catherine Welterdorff,

• 10th grade: Steve Bissell, Jennifer Bilzink, Neal Blatt, Richard Brockhaus, Alicia Courtney, Christina Eldredge, Michelle Grell, Alissa Kutz, Deborah McKenney, Todd Rumpus, Dawn Simmons and Wes Wood,

• 11th grade: Scott Bissell, Mary Cardecia, Theo Chagiolanis, Cynthia Donlin, John Ekander, Eric Feller, Stuart Freedland, Glenn Geyer, Michael Hapgood, Michelle Harrison, Elizabeth Kent, Lori King, Kurt Lindberg, Brian Mukhrphy, Mark Schelsky, Marc Tenenbaum and Julia Vitale,

• 12th grade: Steve Berg, Diane

Blisgler, Michael Dellisio, Matthew Freedman, Marlene Leonard, Ruta Sepelova, Allan Sponseller and Daniel Weiner.

WORKSHOP ATTENDED

Four Mercy High School students recently completed a week-long study in journalism at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind.

Amy Radabaugh, Denise Sarb, Kelly O'Donohue and Amy Kuras participated with a class of 300 in lectures and lab sessions learning to produce quality high school publications. Ball State has conducted journalism workshops for 21 years, and attracted 1,200 students from across the country during the 1988 sessions.

NATIONAL WINNER

Farmington Hills resident Kristin Kranz was recently named a United States Achievement Academy award winner in leadership. The Marian High School student was nominated by teacher Jackie Crow. The criteria for selection are a student's academic performance, interest and aptitude, leadership qualities, responsibility, enthusiasm, motivation to learn and improve citizenship, attitude and cooperative spirit, dependability and recommendation from a teacher or director.

MADRID HONORED

Farmington High School senior Philip Madrid was awarded the National Hispanic Scholar Award, which he will use to attend the University of Michigan and study electrical engineering. Besides his academic performance, Madrid placed third in wrestling and sparring in the Ontario National Karate Championships in Canada in May.

SUSA HONORED

Walled Lake Western Junior and Farmington Hills resident Michelle SUSA was honored during the school's

Top Ten Breakfast June 3. SUSA was one of 10 students from her class honored for top academic achievement in her grade. The event culminated the end of Top Ten Week, in which top achievers from all grades were publicly recognized for their scholastic achievement.

CRANBROOK GRADS

Farmington Hills residents David Hoffman, Eric Roman and Lisa Was were among 217 graduates of the Cranbrook Kingswood School during commencement exercises June 6. A cased day and boarding upper school, Cranbrook Kingswood is a division of the Cranbrook Schools.

COLLEGE PROGRAM

William Wolfgang Neuschaefer, a student at North Farmington High School, is currently attending the 1988 Cornell University Summer College for outstanding high school juniors and seniors in Ithaca, N.Y. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Rolf and Susan Neuschaefer.

William, who is taking college courses in Communication Arts 273, Philosophy 103, is one of the high school students from 42 states and 34 countries who were admitted to the program on the basis of high school record, application essays, recommendations, and College Board scores. In addition, he was one of a select group of students chosen to participate in Summer College's Communications Program.

Students in the Summer College program enroll in regular university courses alongside college students, and may also explore academic and career opportunities in architecture, biology and the health professions, classics, clinical psychology, communication, engineering, law and the legal profession, theater arts and visual arts. Summer College participants reside on the Cornell University campus through August 12.

Experience counts with employers

A new survey of corporate CEOs and presidents on the subject of executive recruiting and hiring practices reveals job experience and expertise are the two most important attributes desired in candidates for high-level positions.

The study also showed that the two most common failings of senior-level candidates during the job interview were that they talked too much, or they had poor communication skills.

The survey, commissioned by Elwell & Associates Inc., an Ann Arbor-based executive-search firm, polled CEOs and senior executives of Michigan and Ohio corporations.

Executives in the service industry valued experience more highly than their counterparts in manufacturing, where related job experience was the most important attribute in high-level-position candidates.

Other key attributes cited for candidates, in order of importance, are

education, communication skills, capacity for hard work, integrity, and adaptability to company culture. Frequently mentioned deficiencies, in addition to poor communication skills, were a lack of knowledge about the company, and insufficient qualifications for the position.

According to Richard Elwell, president of Elwell & Associates, "Most employers know what kind of person they want for the job, but are often frustrated because they can't find that person."

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