

Patients sought for diabetic eye study

Heppner residents who have had diabetes for several years may be eligible to participate in a nationwide study of diabetic eye disease and its treatment, for which the Devers Memorial Eye Clinic of Good Samaritan Hospital & Medical Center in Portland is now recruiting patients.

The new research project, which will involve four thousand patients and nineteen medical centers across the country, is called the Early Treatment Diabetic Retinopathy Study, or ETDRS for short. It is sponsored by the National Eye Institute (NEI), a branch of the Federal Government's National Institutes of Health.

Each of the medical centers involved in the ETDRS is seeking people for the study who have early signs of diabetic retinopathy, an eye disease that is one of the commonest complications of diabetes. Diabetic retinopathy is a disease of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue that lines the inside of the eye. The disorder is the third leading cause of new cases of blindness in the United States, and is present to at least a mild degree in about 40 percent of the nation's eight million diabetics.

As long as diabetic retinopathy remains mild, it is not likely to cause any visual problem. However, in some people the disorder grows steadily worse over a period of years. In these individuals, the blood vessels of the retina may leak fluid, causing swelling of the central retina and blurring of vision. Or the diabetic retinopathy may progress to an even more advanced stage where new blood vessels begin to grow on the retina.

People who have extensive growth of new blood vessels are at high risk of severe visual loss, even blindness, because the vessels may bleed into the center of the eye and cloud vision at any time. Loss of vision can also occur because of retinal detachment, another eye problem that is particularly common in people with advanced diabetic retinopathy.

Fortunately, there is a treatment for diabetic retinopathy that can sharply reduce the risk of losing vision. In this treatment, called photocoagulation, powerful beams of light from a laser are directed into the eye and used to make hundreds of tiny burns on the retina; the presence of these burns somehow discourages the growth of new blood vessels. A previous study supported by the HEI showed that photocoagulation can lower the risk of severe visual loss by 60 percent in eyes with advanced diabetic retinopathy.

The major goal of the new study—the ETDRS—is to determine whether photocoagulation would be more effective in

preserving vision if it were used earlier in the course of diabetic retinopathy, to treat patients whose disease has not yet progressed to an advanced stage. Another goal is to find out whether photocoagulation is effective against leakage of fluid in the central part of the

retina and the blurred vision that often results from this leakage. A third objective of the ETDRS is to determine whether aspirin may be useful in the treatment of diabetic retinopathy.

People with diabetes who are interested in participating

in the ETDRS should contact their ophthalmologist or the physician who is treating their diabetes for advice about entering the study. The study is conducted by Dr. Michael Klein and Dr. Irvin Handelman, staff ophthalmologists at Devers Eye Clinic, and Dr.

Richard Chenoweth, clinic director.

Ophthalmologists or physicians interested in referring patients to the study should contact the ETDRS center at the Devers Eye Clinic at Good

Samaritan Hospital in Portland for further information. The clinic's mailing address is 1200 N.W. 23rd Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97210. Please mail in care of the study's coordinator, Carolyn Beardsley, or call at 229-8356.

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