

March 10, 2013

**MINISTER’S SPEECH IN OBSERVANCE OF**  
**GLAUCOMA DAY MARCH 12, 2013**

The Ministry of Health joins the rest of the World in observance of World Glaucoma Day under the theme “*The world is a wonder to see every day – so don’t let glaucoma get in the way*”.

World Glaucoma Day and the week of activities are observed in order to raise public awareness about this Chronic Non-communicable Disease called Glaucoma.

Glaucoma is defined as progressive optic nerve damage associated with visual field loss. The optic nerve is at the back of the eyeball and it is responsible for transmitting the image from the eye to the brain.

Glaucoma is an important public health issue as it is the leading cause of irreversible blindness. It is most prevalent, starts at a younger age and is most aggressive among blacks. The main risk factors for open angle glaucoma are black race, increasing age, family history of glaucoma and elevated intraocular pressure.

Blindness has significant socioeconomic implications for the affected person, their family, community and country. Therefore every measure must be employed to prevent blindness from glaucoma.

The theme this year appeals to our appreciation for being able to see the wonders of the world which are especially abundant in Dominica 'The Nature Island of the Caribbean'. We are asked to preserve this gift of sight by preventing blindness from glaucoma.

Early detection and adherence to treatment is the strategy needed to reduce blindness from glaucoma. To maximize the effectiveness of this strategy one must target those at risk

especially the relatives of people already diagnosed with open angle glaucoma.

Therefore people with glaucoma should inform their relatives that they have glaucoma; that the relatives are at increased risk of having glaucoma too and they should get their eyes tested for glaucoma.

In Dominica, eye services are delivered in the Seven Primary Health Districts, at the Princess Margaret Hospital, the Dominica Infirmary In the private sector availability and accessibility for screening and treatment for glaucoma is enhanced.

Since glaucoma does not give any signs of its presence until in the advanced stage, it is the policy of eye service to perform opportunistic screening for glaucoma for all patients seen at the eye clinics irrespective of their presenting complaints.

Some of the glaucoma medications are available free of charge in all primary health districts and the others are available at cost price

at the Princess Margaret Hospital. Glaucoma surgery is free for patients 18 and below and 60 years and above this subsidized treatment allows for greater affordability and accessibility of treatment for glaucoma patients.

The Government of Dominica recognizes the importance of glaucoma as the leading cause of irreversible blindness, hence our annual observance of World Glaucoma Day to increase public awareness and our provision of services and treatment for glaucoma which are, accessible and affordable.

I therefore urge Dominicans to do their part! People 40 and older, especially those with relatives who have glaucoma, should have regular eye examinations and glaucoma patients must adhere to their treatment and follow-up appointments.

We will continue to strive to enhance our eye services for all.

*“The world is a wonder to see every day – so don’t let glaucoma  
get in the way”.*

Thank you