

Retinal Diseases and Ways of Reducing Avoidable Blindness in Low Middle Income Countries

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Retinal diseases are the leading cause of low vision and blindness globally. In high income countries, blindness due to retinal diseases especially of avoidable blindness is largely under control. This is because of increase in awareness, access to timely detection and treatment.

In low middle income countries (LMIC), cataract is still the leading cause of blindness. Blindness due to retinal diseases are the major cause after the cataract. Due to increase in access to quality surgical treatment, the overall blindness due to cataract has been reduced. The prevalence of retinal disorders increased with ageing although all ages can be affected. The causes behind the rise in retinal diseases are increase in life expectancy of people, and changes in life style. The sedentary life with consumption of refined foods, lack of exercise and stress are the major cause for systemic diseases like diabetes mellitus, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia. Eye is one of the vital organ affected by these systemic diseases. Diabetic retinopathy (DR), retinal vein occlusion, and retinal artery occlusion are the major retinal diseases as a sequelae of these systemic conditions. DR is the fifth leading cause of blindness comprising of 4.8% of total blindness in the world. Blindness due to diabetic retinopathy is avoidable on timely screening and treatment of vision threatening retinopathy (VTDR). Patients are asymptomatic until the advanced stage of VTDR. Regular screening for the DR is the key for timely detection of diseases.

Age related macular degeneration (AMD) is the most common retinal disease among elderly. AMD is the leading cause of blindness not only in the developed countries but also in LMIC. In

majority of cases, timely precautions and treatment could avoid blindness due to AMD. Ocular injury related sequelae leading to visual impairment such as macular scar, macular hole, retinal detachment, Endophthalmitis are also common in LMIC. Majority of retinal diseases are preventable. Avoiding trauma, healthy diets, reduce stress, avoiding smoking and regular exercise could prevent many retinal diseases. Raising awareness and knowledge among patients on retinal diseases is very important for timely eye check-up and compliances of treatment.

Raising awareness, increasing access to screening at local level, strengthening referral networks and enhancing treatment facilities would help to reduce blindness from majority of retinal diseases in LMIC.

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