



Preface

Eye Care for the Internist



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Editors

As a consequence of limited time devoted to eye disease in medical school, highly technical, not readily available, and unfamiliar instruments used to examine the eye, and ophthalmologic progress notes that are often indecipherable to the internist, many nonophthalmologist physicians view ocular complaints and disease as impossible to evaluate meaningfully and something to refer to an eye care provider. One may think that the main goal of this issue is to unravel the mystery and shed light on an organ that is difficult to examine and has diseases they rarely encounter. Quite the opposite is true. The authors describe ocular symptoms and diseases commonly encountered by internists and medical subspecialists. More importantly, we demonstrate how internists and medical subspecialists are arguably the most important providers in preventing vision loss.

The majority of visual impairment and vision loss is preventable. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 90% of blindness in patients with diabetes is preventable. Diabetic eye disease is the leading cause of blindness in working-age adults, and yes, 90% of this is preventable. The key to preventing blindness in this group is not by implementing some high-tech, mass screening program with costly devices. It begins with a primary care provider asking, "How is your vision for reading and driving?" and "When was your last dilated eye exam?"

In addition to describing the most common eye diseases, the authors demonstrate how important clues to ocular and systemic disease can be detected in the medical office by simple, direct observation and the use of a penlight. They describe the impact ocular disease has on things such as patient mobility, length of hospital stays for non-ocular disease, hip fractures, dementia, and depression.

Our goal of this series is to convey the message that eye care and prevention of blindness begins in the primary care office with simple questions to ask your patients and tools that you use every day. Yes, we demystify the ophthalmic language, conditions, examination instruments, and laser treatments that eye care providers use. More

importantly, however, we impress upon this audience the fact that while the majority of vision impairment is preventable, it can only be prevented with a collaborative approach with internists, medical subspecialists, ophthalmologists, and our patients.

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