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GLAUCOMA SILENTLY THREATENS THE VISION OF MILLIONS OF AMERICANS

Prevent Blindness America Offers Free Online Resource to Educate Consumers

CHICAGO (Dec. 16, 2005) – There are more than 65 million suspected cases of glaucoma across the globe. More than 2 million Americans over the age of 40, and one in ten over the age of 80, have been diagnosed with the disease. But, many have glaucoma and do not even know it.

Glaucoma has long been termed the “sneak thief of sight” because it slowly takes away vision, often without the patient even realizing it. People with glaucoma usually notice a loss of peripheral vision first. Over time, glaucoma may also damage central vision. Unfortunately, once symptoms are detected, the effectiveness of treatment diminishes. And, once vision is lost, it cannot be restored. To raise awareness of the disease, Prevent Blindness America (PBA), a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving sight, has joined other leading eye care groups in designating January as National Glaucoma Awareness Month.

“Almost everyone is at risk for developing glaucoma,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of PBA. “With our increasing aging population, it is essential that we educate ourselves on the disease and do all we can to fight the effects now.”

Glaucoma can be a very confusing disease with many types, risk factors and treatment options. To help educate consumers on what they need to know about glaucoma, PBA has created an online resource, “The Glaucoma Learning Center.” This free Web site, **www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma**, contains a variety of resources including an adult vision risk assessment, an online discussion forum where patients or their loved ones can chat with other glaucoma sufferers, and even a directory of financial assistance and vision care resources. Printed materials are also available free of charge through PBA’s toll free number.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology warns that everyone over the age of 60 is at risk for the disease. Besides age, race can be another important factor in developing glaucoma. According to the National Eye Institute, glaucoma is five times more likely to occur in blacks than in whites and blacks are four times more likely to go blind from it. Hispanics are more likely to develop glaucoma after age 60 than any other group.

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PBA Provides Free, Comprehensive Glaucoma Information

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Other glaucoma risk factors include:

- **Family History:** If you have a parent or sibling who has glaucoma, you are more likely to develop the disease.
- **Diabetes:** People with diabetes have a higher risk (40 percent) of developing glaucoma.
- **Nearsightedness:** People who are very nearsighted are at greater risk.
- **Eye Injury or Surgery:** Those who have had eye surgery or eye injuries may develop secondary glaucoma.
- **Steroid Medication:** Steroids may increase the risk of glaucoma when used for extended periods of time.

“We urge everyone to make regular visits to their eye care professional for complete eye examinations,” added Garrett. “Don’t put off saving your vision until tomorrow. It may be too late!”

Please visit www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma or call 1-800-331-2020 for free information about glaucoma. Printed materials are available in both English and Spanish.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.

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