

# **PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET:**

## **Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)**

### **What is AMD?**

With increasing age some cells at the macula degenerate, stop working normally and cause visual loss. This is the commonest cause of visual loss in the over 65s. There are two types of AMD: "dry" and "wet":

"Dry" AMD is the most common form of the condition. It develops very slowly causing gradual loss of central vision with distortion. However, reasonable vision is usually maintained. There is no medical treatment for this type. Aids such as magnifiers can be helpful with reading and other small detailed tasks.

"Wet" AMD results in new blood vessels growing behind the retina, this causes bleeding and scarring, which can lead to significant sight loss. "Wet" AMD can develop quickly and sometimes responds to treatment in the early stages. It accounts for about 10 per cent of all people with AMD, but 90% of those with severe visual loss.

### **What are the symptoms of AMD?**

Patients notice a blurring of central vision with distortion. Objects may appear to be an abnormal size or shape, and straight lines will appear wavy or blurred. This may happen gradually or more rapidly over a few days. If a haemorrhage develops on the surface of the retina, patients may notice the sudden appearance of a black spot obscuring the vision. If you do notice such symptoms you should arrange an urgent eye examination.

### **Will I go blind?**

AMD very rarely leads to complete sight loss because only the central vision is affected. This means that almost everyone with AMD will have enough side (or peripheral) vision to get around and keep their independence. Now, with new *anti-VEGF treatments*, patients with "wet" AMD can be treated and significant visual loss can often be prevented. The outlook for patients with "wet" AMD is therefore much improved.

### **What should I do if I think that I may have AMD?**

If you have gradual symptoms of blurring of vision you may wish to see your optometrist in the first instance. If distortion is a symptom then you should be seen by an eye specialist. If you have sudden and rapid development of symptoms, or if one eye is already affected by AMD, then you should see an eye specialist urgently. If you are a private patient Mr Charles is able to offer urgent appointments. Otherwise your optometrist will be able to advise you and you should be referred to your local NHS ophthalmic unit promptly.

### **What to expect at your eye examination**

When you see Mr Charles you will have a full examination of the eyes: including measurement of vision, examination of the anterior part of the eye and then examination of the back of the eye after dilation of the pupils with eye drops. If AMD is suspected Mr Charles will arrange further tests including *fluorescein angiography* and *optical coherence tomography* to confirm the diagnosis and give further information useful for treatment. Mr Charles will discuss these tests with you at your consultation.

### **Can “wet” AMD be treated?**

Yes. The mainstay of modern treatment of wet AMD is *Anti vascular endothelial growth factor (anti-VEGF) treatment*. This treatment involves a tiny injection into the *vitreous* jelly inside the eye. Anti-VEGF treatments stop new blood vessels from growing and inactivates them. If given soon enough anti-VEGF treatments can stop vision getting worse. In some cases sight can improve. The key is to have early treatment before significant visual loss has occurred.

Anti-VEGF injections are given into the eye over a period of months, usually starting with three injections over 12 weeks. There are 3 different anti-VEGF agents:

**Macugen:** the first anti-VEGF treatment specifically developed for AMD, gaining FDA approval in the USA in 2004.

**Lucentis:** specifically developed for use in AMD, Lucentis has been found to be very effective when give as an intravitreal injection, so that it has superceded Macugen.

**Avastin:** another anti-VEGF agent first used in the treatment of colon cancer. Found to be effective in treatment of AMD when given by intravitreal injection. May be as effective as Lucentis, but there are many ongoing trials comparing the effectiveness of the two agents.

### **Appointments**

If you do feel that you have symptoms of AMD then you should consult an eye care professional.

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If you wish to discuss how to make a private appointment with Mr Charles, please ring his secretary on: **07730 714619**.

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