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For Immediate Release

CHRONIC DRY EYE: THE “OTHER” SYMPTOM OF MENOPAUSE
Often Unrecognized, Unaddressed Part of Aging Affects Millions of Americans

(Washington, DC, and Red Bank, NJ, January 2, 2005) – Imagine how it feels to wake up in the morning with dry, itchy eyes and blurred vision. Now imagine living with this condition every day – where your eyes feel irritated, uncomfortable and your daily tasks are difficult to do. For the millions of Americans who suffer from chronic dry eye disease, a condition where the eye does not produce the right quantity or quality of tears, this is an all too familiar reality. In fact, a recent study found that 3.2 million women – or 1 in 12 – over the age of 50 in the U.S. suffer from chronic dry eye.¹

The eye, like every other part of the body, is subject to the wear and tear of aging. Just as some people search anxiously for that first gray hair, it's important that everyone – with the help of their eye doctor – also keep their eyes peeled for the first signs of vision problems.

“The health of your eyes should be an important part of your overall health, yet many women, unless they're putting on mascara, popping in their contacts or hunting for their glasses, don't think much about it,” said Amy Niles, President and CEO of the National Women's Health Resource Center. “Women don't realize the painful dryness in their eyes is a real condition and that they can get treatment by visiting their eye doctor.”

What is Chronic Dry Eye?

Also known as keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS), chronic dry eye is among the most common complaints heard by eye doctors, yet many people don't recognize they could have the disease and/or understand its severity.²

Chronic dry eye is not simply a nuisance condition. Rather, it can be caused by a functional problem in the tear-producing glands of the eyes. This not only reduces tear production, but creates an insufficient amount of tears to lubricate and nourish the eye. Symptoms like uncomfortable dryness, itchiness and blurred vision may make daily tasks like reading, watching TV and driving difficult.^{3,4}

For Barbara Simard, a nurse living near Pittsburgh, this was an all too familiar reality. When she was diagnosed three years ago, she realized the impact this disease had on how she lived her daily life.

"Making it through the day at work became challenging as the uncomfortable dryness in my eyes would sometimes prevent me from completing my responsibilities. My eyes were dry and itchy and reading patient charts all day became impossible to do," said Barbara. "Eventually, I visited my eye doctor and I was relieved to find out that dry eye isn't something I just have to live with. It is a real disease with effective treatment options."

Who Suffers from Dry Eye?

Although chronic dry eye occurs in both men and women, it affects women two-to-three times more often and is most common in post-menopausal women because of the hormonal changes associated with aging.⁵ Although it is more commonly thought of as "the libido hormone," testosterone plays a critical role in maintaining the tear-making lacrimal gland. As women grow older, their production of testosterone declines leaving the ocular surface susceptible to inflammation. Once the lacrimal gland is inflamed, it may reduce tear production.

"Thousands of patients come to my office each year complaining that they can't work or do things they enjoy because of the discomfort associated with chronic dry eye," said Lisa Battat, Director of Cornea and Refractive Surgery at Everett and Hurite Ophthalmic Association in Pittsburgh. "Although there are dozens of drops available to add moisture, my ultimate treatment goal is to identify and treat the underlying cause of the disease – not just mask the symptoms."

Is Chronic Dry Eye Something I Have to Live With?

Anyone who suspects they may have chronic dry eye should visit an eye doctor, who can make a diagnosis and determine the proper treatment regimen. While there are eye drops that provide temporary symptomatic relief, there are also prescription therapies available to address this condition. Eye doctors can determine the best therapy for each individual patient.

Today, Barbara is one of the thousands of dry eye sufferers who have been able to resume her regular activities with the help of appropriate therapy. "I'm thrilled that my eyes no longer bother me. I can read and use my computer without any eye problems and do the things I love like watching movies and catching up on good books."

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¹ Schaumberg DA, Sullivan DA, Buring JE, et al. Prevalence of dry eye syndrome among US women. *Am J Ophthalmol.* 2003 Aug;136(2):318-26.

² The 2002 Gallup Study of Dry Eye Sufferers.

³ Kozma CM, Hirsch JD, Wojcik AR. Economic and quality of life impact of dry eye symptoms. *Invest Ophthalmol Vis Sci.* 2000;41:S928.

⁴ Nelson JD, Helms H, Fischella R, et al. A new look at dry eye disease and its treatment. *Adv Ther.* 2000;17:84-93.

⁵ Schaumberg DA, Sullivan DA, Buring JE, et al. Prevalence of dry eye syndrome among US women. *Am J Ophthalmol.* 2003 Aug;136(2):318-26.