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Fighting Glaucoma: Continued

cause of cost will no longer be risking vision loss. The latest generation of glaucoma medications is highly effective but requires the patient to be vigilant about compliance, notes Dr. McManus. Ignoring directions can, over time, lead to vision loss, even when a physician is following the patient. Some patients may be non-compliant because of physical limitations. For example, they can’t place drops correctly in the eye because of tremors due to Parkinson’s disease or other neurologic disorders. Having a condition like rheumatoid arthritis can present challenges with even opening the medication bottle. Busy lifestyles can interfere with daily eye drop therapy, too.

“Many patients simply have numerous responsibilities and are always on the go. This is often why they forget to use their glaucoma medications every day,” says Dr. McManus. The high cost of glaucoma medications is another obstacle for many patients, he adds. When patients find the medications to be cost prohibitive, studies have shown many will skip doses to make their supply of drops last longer. “It’s understandable when patients feel that they can’t afford their medication. But they are risking their vision. If vision loss occurs, it is frequently permanent,” warns Dr. McManus. The chart study at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery also examined the potential financial impact on the US health care system when SLT eliminates the need for expensive eye drops to treat glaucoma.

Using life expectancy tables from the Social Security Administration, Dr. McManus and his team completed a cost analysis. Their conclusion: On average, when a patient no longer needs typical glaucoma medications, expected savings can be in excess of $16,000 over his or her lifetime after being treated with SLT.

New Glaucoma Surgery

A new surgery for glaucoma is now available at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery. Using a new device called the Kahook Dual Blade, glaucoma specialist Jason K. Darlington, MD, is able to improve fluid drainage inside the eye to lower intraocular pressure and preserve the health of the optic nerve. The outpatient procedure is minimally invasive and takes less than 15 minutes.

“I can easily perform the surgery through a micro-incision, which is what makes it minimally invasive,” assures Dr. Darlington.

“This is a very good procedure for patients who have a diagnosis of glaucoma and are undergoing cataract surgery. It can be done at the same time,” he adds. “Afterward, they are likely to need less glaucoma medication or be off their medication entirely.”

The Kahook procedure is also an alternative for glaucoma patients who have developed allergies to eye drops for glaucoma or aren’t responding adequately to medications.

“If someone has tried all the medicated drops available and they haven’t responded, instead of having a more invasive surgery, this minimally invasive procedure can be done first,” says Dr. Darlington. “It can be a safe, alternative way to control glaucoma.”