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### iStent procedure speeds recovery for glaucoma patients

EDMONTON – Surgeons at the Royal Alexandra Hospital’s Regional Eye Centre are utilizing a minimally-invasive surgery that improves recovery for many local glaucoma patients.

Every year, about 100 patients with moderate, early-stage glaucoma undergo the iStent procedure. A surgeon inserts a millimetre-long titanium tube, called a stent, into the eye to reopen the eye’s natural drainage system and lower ocular pressure, which causes glaucoma.

The stent is inserted through a very small incision on the surface of the eye, allowing for reduced healing time. The surgery can be done alone or in combination with cataract surgery.

Patients who undergo the iStent procedure can recover within days, compared to several weeks following traditional glaucoma surgery, which is still required for patients with severe, advanced glaucoma.

“Using the iStent speeds our patients’ recovery, so they can get back to their regular lives more quickly,” says Dr. Michael Dorey, an AHS ophthalmologist and glaucoma specialist.

Glaucoma is a slow, progressive disease caused by increased pressure in the eye that results in optic nerve damage and permanent loss of vision. The buildup of pressure is often due to a problem with the drainage of fluid produced inside the eye.

Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness worldwide, after cataract, but the number one cause of irreversible blindness. Between 400 and 500 glaucoma surgeries, including iStent procedures, are performed in Edmonton every year.

For Louise Skog-Lachapelle, the iStent procedure had her back to her normal daily activities within days.

The 71-year-old Edmontonian received several surgeries on her right eye to remove a cataract and control the rising eye pressure caused by glaucoma. When her left eye also began to deteriorate, physician Dr. Dorey performed a combined cataract and iStent surgery two years ago.

“It was a very simple procedure and a very easy recovery for me,” said Skog-Lachapelle. “Before the surgery I felt like I was going blind and thought I might have to learn how to read Braille, but now my vision has stabilized. This has had a big effect on my life.”

Edmonton and Calgary are the only two centres in Western Canada that use iStent technology. Dr. Dorey performed Edmonton’s first iStent procedure in 2011.

There is no way to prevent glaucoma but everyone over 50 years of age should have an eye exam at least every two years to help detection and early treatment.

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More than 400,000 Canadians are believed to have glaucoma although as many as half of these individuals may not be aware they have the disease. Glaucoma causes deterioration of peripheral vision first, which often goes unnoticed. Surgery cannot repair damage to the optical nerve or restore vision, but it can prevent further loss of vision.

World Glaucoma Week runs March 9 to 15.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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