Survey: Consumers Need Better Education About Eye Health and Nutrition

“Eye on the Boomer,” a recent survey conducted by the Ocular Nutrition Society and sponsored by Bausch + Lomb, found that although baby boomers (men and women aged 45 to 65) say they worry about losing their vision nearly as much as they worry about heart disease and cancer, the majority of respondents are not taking proactive steps to protect their eye health as they age and were not aware of important nutrients that play a key role in eye health. We asked Dr. Jeffrey Anshel, founding director of the Ocular Nutrition Society, about the results and implications of the “Eye on the Boomer” survey and the importance of ocular nutrition.

Q: What were the key findings of the survey?

A: This survey showed that boomers value their vision more than any other sense, yet more than half of the respondents said they do not get an annual eye examination. Almost 90 percent of respondents knew that too much sunlight or uncontrolled blood sugar can be damaging to vision, but fewer than half (41 percent) were aware that smoking increases the risk for blindness. In addition, many people surveyed were not aware of the nutrients that play a key role in eye health. Specifically, the survey found that:

- Almost 60 percent of respondents were not aware of the role of omega-3 fatty acids.
- Two-thirds of respondents (66 percent) were not aware of the role of lutein.
- Nine of 10 respondents (89 percent) were not aware of the role of zeaxanthin. Although more than half of the survey respondents reported they take vitamin and nutrient supplements to make up for the gaps in their diet, only 18 percent reported taking supplements to support their eye health. Of those who do not take supplements, 59 percent said they believe they receive enough nutrients from food.

Q: What do these survey results imply?

A: The survey results show that boomers value their vision but do not know the measures they need to take to protect it, so there is a need for greater education on the lifestyle modifications they should be making to protect their eye health.

Q: Why are these findings significant?

A: The number of Americans at risk for age-related eye diseases is increasing as the baby boomer generation ages. In fact, the National Eye Institute estimates that over the next 30 years, the number of Americans who experience eye health issues will double because of aging baby boomers. The demand for vision services is expected to flood the healthcare system by 2015 owing to age-related eye disease and diabetes. If we can educate Americans about the steps they need to take to safeguard their eye health, we can help address this national public health issue.

Q: What nutritional steps should eye health professionals recommend to their patients to protect their eyes?

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The National Eye Institute estimates over the next 30 years, the number of Americans with eye health issues will double due to aging baby boomers.

A: Studies have shown that diets rich in lutein and zeaxanthin may decrease the development of age-related macular degeneration, so it is important to tell patients to eat certain foods, such as spinach, kale and broccoli, to get these nutrients. Omega-3 fatty acids have been suggested to benefit the eye as well, so adults should be eating foods, such as tuna or salmon, that are rich in omega-3s.

Many Americans’ diets are deficient in these nutrients, so eye care professionals should also talk to their patients about considering a nutritional supplement specifically formulated for eye health.

For more detailed information about the “Eye on the Boomer” survey, visit www.ocularnutritionsociety.org.

1. Ocular Nutrition Society Eye on the Boomer Survey, October 2011

Keratoconus and Scleral Lens Guides Translated

Two popular handbooks are now available in several languages.

“Correction of Keratoconus With GP Lenses,” by L. Gina Sorbara, OD, MSc, and the team at the Centre for Contact Lens Research at the University of Waterloo, has been translated into French, German, Italian, Polish, Serbian and Spanish. “A Guide to Scleral Lens Fitting,” by Eef van der Worp, BOptom, PhD, will soon be available in French, German, Italian, Serbian and Spanish. Both guides and their translations were supported by unrestricted educational grants from Bausch + Lomb.

“Correction of Keratoconus With GP Lenses” provides a comprehensive look at the disease, including etiology and genetics, as well as practical clinical information. It includes step-by-step guides to lens design and fitting, and disease follow-up and long-term management. Numerous topography maps, fluorescein photographs, illustrations and case examples serve as visual aids for clinicians who care for this challenging population.

“A Guide to Scleral Lens Fitting” is the result of Dr. van der Worp’s exhaustive research and his personal interviews with clinicians around the world. Using newly standardized terminology to describe various fitting philosophies and techniques, this guide provides insights into scleral lens design and offers a five-step fitting approach. Its goal is to give practitioners a framework to integrate scleral lens fitting into their practices.

To obtain free copies of these guides, please contact your authorized B+L Boston representative.
Understanding Patients With Keratoconus

The executive director of the National Keratoconus Foundation offers insights for eye care practitioners.

Q. The NKCF is an important resource for keratoconus patients. In your experience, what are the first questions asked by newly diagnosed patients?

A. Often, when patients are told they have keratoconus, they hear only that nothing can be done and that they will lose their vision, which they translate to mean they will go blind. So, their first question is, "Will I go blind?" followed by, "What will this mean for my future?" They call the NKCF in tears, asking for anything that will allow them to keep or improve their vision in order to continue to work, attend school, see their children grow up or be able to provide for their families.

Most often, neither the patient nor his friends or family members have heard of keratoconus. Most can't pronounce it, let alone spell it, so they have difficulty finding information. After the initial shock of learning they have a progressive eye disease, most newly diagnosed patients go immediately to the Internet to learn all they can about it.

Q. What types of information and services does NKCF offer?

A. On the NKCF website (also available in Spanish at http://www.nkcf.org/es), patients will find the latest news about advances in keratoconus research and treatments, and they can request informational booklets, such as "What Is Keratoconus." They will also have access to KC-Link, an e-mail-based worldwide interactive forum, and NKCF Forum, an online bulletin board. They can sign up for our monthly E-Updates and newsletters, and they can learn where NKCF educational seminars will be held. We maintain a list of outreach volunteers for anyone who wants personal contact with other keratoconus patients, and we assist people who would like to start a local support group. We also maintain a list of eye care professionals who have a special interest in treating keratoconus.

Q. A diagnosis of keratoconus is the beginning of an important partnership between a patient and his eye doctor. Please share a story about such a relationship.

A. A 30-year-old lawyer and mother of two young children called in distress. She was finding it increasingly difficult to meet the demands of her job and her family. The doctor who had diagnosed her keratoconus had recommended corneal collagen cross-linking (CXL), which is not yet FDA-approved. The woman looked at clinical trials and considered going to Canada for treatment, but the more she learned, the more reluctant she became because she knew her corneas were very thin. The NKCF provided her with a list of keratoconus specialists in her area for a second opinion. After examination by a specialist, she learned she was not a good candidate for CXL. Instead, the doctor fitted her with scleral lenses. "It's amazing. I can see," the patient said. "It's like when I was 12 years old and put on soft contact lenses for the first time and could see like a normal person. I am so grateful NKCF exists. NKCF educated me about keratoconus and the various options available."

Q. What is Bausch + Lomb's relationship with the NKCF?

A. Bausch + Lomb has been a major supporter of the NKCF since 1986, underwriting the printing expenses of "What Is Keratoconus?" Available in English and Spanish, the sixth edition of this booklet explains keratoconus, its effect on vision and treatment options in easy-to-understand language. Thanks to B+L’s generosity, the NKCF has been able to provide this booklet at no cost to patients worldwide for 25 years.
Wilmington Plant Receives Quality in Manufacturing Award

Small site has big impact as sole producer of B+L GP lens material for global market.

Bausch + Lomb’s Wilmington, Massachusetts, manufacturing facility recently received the company’s first Quality in Manufacturing Award. The Wilmington plant is one of only two B+L sites worldwide (one large site and one small site) to receive this honor.

“I am very proud that the hard work and efforts of our Wilmington team have been recognized,” said David Bland, Director, Global Boston GP Business. “Their dedication is demonstrated on a daily basis as they continually look for ways to improve their systems. This commitment leads to the highest level of quality represented by this award.”

The Quality in Manufacturing Award recognizes best practices and behaviors that positively affect customer satisfaction, reliability of supply, compliance to standards and process improvements. What makes the award even more meaningful to the Wilmington facility, said Quality Manager Kim Olney, is that the plant employs just 24 people, yet this single site produces all GP buttons for B+L, the global market leader in this modality.

“Often, people think it is easier to implement best practices and quality processes at a small site, but the opposite is true,” Ms. Olney said. “Whether you have a thousand people or 24, you still must comply with the same standards for FDA and other agencies. So maintaining quality excellence is actually more of a challenge for a smaller site.”

How did the two dozen Wilmington employees meet this challenge and become leaders in quality? The answer lies in the successful combination of Lean Manufacturing Principles and shared accountability, which empowers all employees to make a difference in day-to-day operations. As Ms. Olney explained: “Quality is everybody’s business. It doesn’t reside solely in the quality assurance department. It has to be maintained throughout the organization and instilled in every employee. Fortunately, we have a highly experienced group of dedicated, hardworking employees who are passionate about the business. They bring an energy and determination each and every day and truly are the epitome of a high-performing team.”

Where quality and efficiency coexist

In 2004, the Wilmington facility began implementing Lean Manufacturing Principles, championed by Operations Manager, Ken Harty, through training offered by B+L Global Operations. Mr. Harty fully embraced the concept, partnered with Greater Boston Manufacturing Partnership (GBMP) and the results have been outstanding.

Ms. Olney admitted she needed to be converted to the Lean way of thinking because, like many people, she believed Lean principles and quality products could not coexist. Keeping an open mind and seeing positive results won her over. For example, employees at the Wilmington facility have reduced lead time from 45 days to 15 days and cut inventory by more than half, while maintaining a 99% on-time delivery rate. (Orders received by 2 p.m. eastern time ship complete the same day.) As Ms. Olney noted, on-time delivery affects everyone: labs, practitioners and, ultimately, patients. “When we are on backorder,” she said, “everyone is on backorder.”

In addition to saving time, the Wilmington employees maintain exceptional quality, even as GP lenses become increasingly complex. “The quality of our lenses is unsurpassed,” Ms. Olney said. “There is no variability in color, for example, and our tolerances are extremely tight. This means our customers can finish lenses quickly and easily, without needing to adjust their lathes for inconsistencies. As a result, practitioners and their patients receive extremely precise lenses.”

The labs also appreciate the Wilmington team’s ability to fulfill special requests. “To effectively operate in the GP lab channel business, we need to be highly flexible and respond rapidly to the myriad customer requests and requirements,” Ms. Olney explained. “We can customize colors, sizes and base cuts in 11 different materials. As you know, the large-diameter business is growing rapidly, and on any given day, we may receive orders for 17-mm lens blanks up to 21-mm lens blanks. We routinely deliver these and other products with the various nuances our customers require.”

Sharing success

In addition to continually looking for ways to improve internal processes, employees at the Wilmington plant have begun reaching out to other customers to help them become more efficient. At one site, for example, they have designated certain inventory levels that will automatically trigger replenishment by the Wilmington plant. The goal is to allow the customer to maintain more consistent inventory levels, allowing for continuous production.

The Wilmington plant has been so successful at incorporating Lean Manufacturing Principles while improving product quality that it has been declared a benchmark site for all B+L facilities. In addition, the GBMP periodically asks the plant to host tours so other GBMP members can observe Lean principles and best practices in action.

According to Ms. Olney, there was no single dramatic change that led to the Wilmington plant’s current status, and employees there are not resting on their laurels. “One of the Lean philosophies is to make small improvements but make many of them and make them often,” she said. “There is always something to improve, so we are always looking for opportunities. It truly is a journey.”

Bausch + Lomb Boston Update

Number 27, June 2012