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Opinion Article

Reconsidering How We Approach Eye Health in Modern Medicine

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DESCRIPTION

Eye diseases affect millions worldwide, yet they remain surprisingly underrepresented in public health priorities and everyday conversations about wellbeing. The impact of visual impairment on an individual's quality of life is profound, influencing everything from daily activities to emotional wellbeing. Despite this, many people view vision problems as an inevitable part of aging or something that can be simply corrected with glasses or surgery. This perspective fails to capture the complexities involved in many eye conditions and underestimates the challenges faced by those who live with visual impairments.

Chronic eye conditions such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration, and cataracts have far-reaching consequences. Unlike temporary vision issues, these diseases often progress silently, causing irreversible damage before symptoms become noticeable. Glaucoma, sometimes referred to as the "silent thief of sight," gradually impairs peripheral vision without causing pain or immediate discomfort. Many patients remain unaware of their condition until significant vision loss has already occurred. This highlights the importance of early detection and regular eye examinations, yet these remain far from common practice in many regions, especially in low-resource settings.

One reason eye health is overlooked may be that vision is often taken for granted until it deteriorates. People may not fully appreciate the importance of preventive care or regular screenings, which can catch problems before they escalate. Unfortunately, in many healthcare systems, eye care is not seamlessly integrated with other medical services, making it easy for individuals to miss routine checks. This is particularly concerning for people living with chronic diseases such as diabetes, where damage to the eyes can begin early and progress rapidly if not managed carefully.

Another challenge is access to care. Even in places with advanced healthcare systems, disparities exist. Vision services are often less accessible to economically disadvantaged populations or those

living in rural areas. The cost of treatment, lack of transportation, and limited availability of specialists can all create barriers. These obstacles contribute to delayed diagnosis and treatment, resulting in avoidable vision loss. When a condition like cataract can be addressed effectively through surgery, the fact that millions remain visually impaired because they cannot access care is a clear indicator that something in the system is not working.

The consequences of untreated or poorly managed eye diseases extend beyond vision alone. Visual impairment influences social engagement, employment opportunities, mental health, and overall independence. People with vision loss may find themselves isolated, unable to participate fully in their communities or pursue their interests. The frustration and loss of confidence that often accompany deteriorating sight can lead to depression and anxiety, adding a psychological burden to the physical one.

Given these wide-ranging effects, it is clear that eye health should be regarded as an integral part of overall health strategies. Healthcare professionals outside of ophthalmology can play a vital role by promoting eye screenings and recognizing early warning signs. Schools should incorporate regular vision assessments into their health programs, ensuring children receive timely attention to any problems that might hinder their development or learning.

Employers also have a role to play. In an era where screen use is nearly universal across many jobs, the impact of digital strain on eyes should not be underestimated. Workplaces can encourage good eye habits and support access to regular vision care, helping to prevent long-term damage.

Public awareness campaigns are needed to correct the common misconception that vision loss is unavoidable or insignificant. When people understand that many eye conditions are preventable or manageable if caught early, they are more likely to seek care proactively. This not only benefits individuals but reduces the burden on health systems by preventing more complex treatments later.

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CONCLUSION

In summary, vision is fundamental to how we experience and interact with the world. Yet, the neglect of eye health in many healthcare discussions means too many people face preventable vision loss. By shifting the way we think about eye care from a

niche specialty to a necessary aspect of well-being – society can ensure that sight is preserved for as many people as possible. The time to act is now, before silent vision loss becomes a more common and avoidable burden on individuals and communities alike.