

Diabetes and Eye Health

Synopsis:

Although the global numbers of people who are blind have shown a very modest increase from 1990 to 2010, the prevalence of blindness in those aged over 50 has been more than halved. This is excellent news, although still much work needs to be done to address cataract and refractive error. However, diabetic eye disease presents an ever-increasing problem. Globally there are over 350 million people with diabetes and that number is predicted to double within 20 years. The provision of the needed annual exams and laser treatment is beyond the capacity of the world's 205,000 ophthalmologists. The International Council of Ophthalmology is promoting the development of ophthalmologist lead teams to expand the capacity to provide eye care. Within Australia we too face challenges; only 50% of those with diabetes have had their recommended eye exam and this falls to 20% for Indigenous people with diabetes. We have much work to do to develop the systems needed to address this. It is important to remember that in 1990 we already had the knowledge and technology to prevent 98% of diabetic blindness. We need to apply what we know how to do.