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EDITORIAL

Screening for eye disease: Our role, responsibility and opportunity of research

Despistaje de la patología ocular: nuestro rol, responsabilidad y oportunidad de investigación

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Optometry is a healthcare profession that is concerned with eyes and related structures, vision, and visual system. Optometrists are health professionals who are qualified to detect and measure eye refractive disorders, to treat such disorders by prescribing, supplying and fitting adequate optical aids, to evaluate and characterize vision-related physiologic attributes and functions, to provide advice on eye care and eye health, but also to detect and perform screening for eye disease.[1] Optometrists are trained to act as effective screening agents for all types of ocular pathological conditions,[2] since glaucoma[3,4] to retinal disorders, such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD)[5] or diabetic retinopathy.[6,7]

An effective referral[8,9] is the final aim of our screening activity, but without ignoring or refusing our duties and responsibilities as health professionals. Optometric professional responsibility encompasses the duties to act in a professional manner, obey the law, avoid conflicts of interest, and put the interests of our patients ahead of our own interests. Eye disease screening and referral is also part of this professional responsibility and we cannot delegate it without a justification in the benefit of patient. There are even optometrists in some countries that are qualified to prescribe therapeutic drugs to treat some of the eye disease conditions that they are able to detect.[10] Therefore, we should not forget this screening role and we must try to have a continuous training in this area during all our professional life.

Optometrists have also the opportunity of contributing to the research in eye disease, allowing showing our great potential and commitment with the development of Optometry in all its branches. Indeed, the number of scientific articles by optometrists on the study of different ocular pathological conditions, especially on how to make more effective their detection, has increased significantly in the last years. In the current issue of Journal of Optometry, we compile different scientific articles providing new insights into optometric eye disease screening field as well as defining new clinical methodologies and strategies for an effective referral and eye disease optometric management. A review of the current concept of epidemic keratoconjunctivitis management,[11] a description of the clinical evidence of the central areolar choroidal dystrophy with associated dominant drusen,[12] and the description of a new method for evaluating optic nerve head drusen with fundus photography[13] and a new procedure based on background chromatic contrast preference with potential diagnostic use for AMD[14] are included in this issue. This is an additional contribution to the research on eye disease screening. These types of contributions are necessary for improving and optimizing the optometrist's clinical practice and eye disease screening role.

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Educational programmes on eye disease and detection as well as research on this area are crucial to continue with our role of screening agents, to be committed with our professional responsibility, to be considered as active health professionals; it is simply indispensable to practice the optometry.

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