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Trends in Prevalence of Diagnosed Ocular Disease and Utilization of Eye Care Services in American Veterans

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** To assess trends in prevalence of diagnosed ocular disease and utilization of eye care services in the VA healthcare system.

**Design:** Prevalence study

**Methods:** We performed a retrospective study of all eligible Veterans in the VA Capitol Health Care Network from 2007 to 2011. The VA database was used to abstract demographic and socioeconomic variables including age, race, gender, marital status, service connection, prescription copay, homelessness, VA facility. Primary outcome measures were prevalence of diagnosed ocular disease and utilization of eye care. Ocular diagnoses were determined by ICD-9 codes and utilization by prescription medication fills, visits to eye care clinics, and cataract surgery frequency.

**Results:** The average age of Veterans ranged from 59.8-60.9, the majority of Veterans were male (88.1-89.8%), and there was a high proportion of African Americans (29.5-30%). The prevalence of all ocular diagnoses increased from 20.5% in 2007 to 23.3% in 2011 ( $P < 0.01$ ), a 13.7% increase. Similarly, the prevalence of diagnosed cataract increased by 35.7% ( $P=0.02$ ) from 7.1% in 2007 to 9.6% in 2011. Diagnosed glaucoma prevalence increased by 9.4% ( $P = 0.03$ ) from 6.7 to 7.4%. The percent of patients seen in eye clinics increased 11.6% in the five-year study period to 24.0% in FY 2011 ( $P = 0.05$ ). Utilization of ophthalmic medications increased 20% ( $P < 0.01$ ). The rate of cataract surgery did not change significantly during the study period.

**Conclusions:** The prevalence of diagnosed eye conditions among American Veterans is increasing, as is the utilization of eye care services. Cataract surgery rates did not increase, which may indicate a need to increase availability of these services.

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