

EDUCATION

AEVR Celebrates World Glaucoma Week with Congressional Briefing



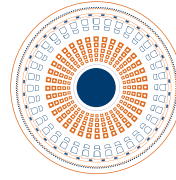
Leon W. Herndon, Jr. MD (Duke University Medical Center)



Thomas Brunner, President & CEO, Glaucoma Research Foundation



Trinh Green, MD, Glaucoma Research Foundation Patient Representative



**RESEARCH SAVING SIGHT,
RESTORING VISION**
an Initiative of the
Alliance for Eye and Vision Research

On March 8, the Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) celebrated *World Glaucoma Week* by conducting its first virtual *Research Saving Sight, Restoring Vision* Congressional Briefing of 2022, *Understanding Glaucoma Patients: Health Disparities and Unmet Needs*. AEVR's *Research Saving Sight, Restoring Vision Initiative* is a sustained activity to educate about the value of eye and vision research and the enormous strides that National Eye Institute (NEI) funded research has made to establish improvements to diagnosis, treatments, therapies, and outcomes for eye and vision care.

The Briefing featured experts in glaucoma, including Dr. Leon Herndon, professor of ophthalmology at Duke University Medical Center, Tom Brunner, President & CEO of the Glaucoma Research Foundation, and Dr. Trinh Green, a practicing physician who was diagnosed with glaucoma at the age of 21.

After outlining an introduction to glaucoma, Dr. Herndon shared that the prevalence of glaucoma is six to eight times higher in African American patients who are also at fifteen times higher risk of blindness. He also shared that glaucoma has several consequences on a patient's vision, including not only the loss of visual field creating blind spots, but also a loss of contrast sensitivity, loss of visual acuity, and problems with glare and light sensitivity.

Once a patient is diagnosed with glaucoma, Dr. Herndon emphasized that medication adherence is vital in stemming the tide of the disease. Treatments for glaucoma include traditional eye drops, and over the past several years, advancements and other treatments have been identified and include injectable sustained-release implants, laser treatment, surgical procedures, long-tube shunts, and micro-invasive glaucoma surgery. As part of his work in West Africa, Dr. Herndon's research on the genetic links related to glaucoma may lay the foundation for novel therapeutic interventions and increase awareness of glaucoma. Health disparities that exist for patients, disparities in the ophthalmology profession, and disparities in accessing critical glaucoma care were all identified as issues that need to be addressed and improved.

Tom Brunner introduced participants to the Glaucoma Research Foundation whose mission is to cure glaucoma and restore vision through innovative research. Mr. Brunner provided a global perspective of glaucoma emphasizing that this disease has no cure. With an estimated 60 million cases worldwide, and an estimated 111 million people globally expected to have glaucoma by 2040, the global figures mirror those projections in the United States. With this understanding, and to address the looming epidemic, Mr. Brunner emphasized the need to continue to invest in

promising research to improve outcomes for glaucoma patients.

From a patient perspective, Dr. Trinh Green shared her personal experience with Glaucoma. When she was diagnosed at 21, she was being monitored for a different eye condition. At that time, her ophthalmologist noticed the markers of glaucoma. For the first seven years after her diagnosis, Dr. Green focused on taking eye drops and didn't experience substantial loss in vision. At 28, Dr. Green shared that she began losing vision in her left eye and was advised to have a trabeculectomy to create a new pathway for fluid to be drained to save her eyesight. In subsequent years, despite adherence and continued engagement with specialists, Dr. Green continued to lose peripheral vision.

Treatments for Dr. Green have included revisions to her trabeculectomy, express shunts and Ahmed valves inserted into her eyes, a laser diode cyclophotocoagulation procedure, and a corneal graft to address side effects. Advancements in research have helped to improve these interventions and they have continued to allow Dr. Green to see. While Dr. Green shared that she has lost about 50% of the vision in her left eye and some vision in her right, she's been fortunate that her central vision is still very good. While glaucoma affected Dr. Green's dreams, her day-to-day life, and her career path, the research that has been done on glaucoma to date has helped provide new and innovative interventions and therapies, and she emphasized the continued need for research for herself, and for future generations.

Each of the panelists emphasized the value that research has played to date and the new opportunities on the horizon. The National Eye Institute (NEI) is funding research projects including artificial intelligence to improve diagnosis, improved clinical methods, and for new and improved interventions, devices, and therapies that preserve sight and could restore vision.

AEVR was pleased to be able to host this Congressional Briefing during *World Glaucoma Week*, which is being celebrated March 6-12, 2022 with events around the world. The Briefing continued to highlight the value for eye and vision research in the care of glaucoma patients and AEVR thanks its supporters who helped make this event possible, including:

- Research to Prevent Blindness
- American Glaucoma Society
- ARVO (which provided steaming support)
- Glaucoma Research Foundation
- Optometric Glaucoma Society
- Glaukos