A TRIP TO THE EYE DOCTOR SAVES MAN’S LIFE

Wills Eye Doctors Say Vision Changes Can Warn of Stroke Before It Happens, and That Temporary Blurriness in One Eye Is Cause for Emergency Care

New Research Study Aims to Show How Vision Problems Relate to Stroke Risk

(Philadelphia, PA) - When 65-year-old Thomas Innes, a Philadelphia attorney came home from work one evening, he noticed his vision was blurry – but only in one eye. When he looked in the mirror, the affected eye looked slightly different than the other, but the blurriness had gone away in ninety minutes so he tried not to worry that anything might be wrong. Besides, he had no headache, no weakness on one side, he could walk and talk just fine, even smiled like always. It never occurred to him – he was dangerously close to having a life-threatening stroke.

When he called his sister, a registered nurse, and told her about the sudden onset of blurriness in one eye, she told him to go to the nearest ER.

Mr. Innes was sent to the Wills Eye Hospital Emergency Room in Center City, Philadelphia – one of only a few 24/7 emergency rooms in the nation dedicated only to eye- and vision-related problems.
“You would be surprised how many life-saving diagnoses we make from eye issues that lead us to other undetected systemic findings,” said Dr. Anna P. Murchison, Director of the Wills Eye Emergency Department. “The eye can tell you a lot,” she added.

“Mr. Innes was diagnosed with acute Horner Syndrome – a relatively rare and serious finding that sometimes arises from a dangerous condition called a carotid dissection,” said Murchison. In plain language – a tear had formed in the wall of the internal carotid artery in his neck and was causing a narrowing of the artery - the main supply of blood to the eye and brain.

Mr. Innes was admitted to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, started on blood thinners, monitored for a few days and is now back to work. He is grateful he paid attention to his one blurry eye. “I could have easily ignored it and thought maybe I just needed a change in my prescription or was developing some minor eye infection and then that would have been a ticking time bomb,” said Innes.

"Jefferson's great collaboration with Wills Eye has been essential in diagnosing many patients with life-threatening conditions – conditions that might otherwise be missed," said Dr. Maria Pineda, the neurologist at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital who treated Mr. Innes.

Stroke symptoms usually develop suddenly and without warning, but sometimes they may occur on or off for a day or two. About 40 percent of nerve cells in the brain are related to the eye. “More and more patients are realizing that strokes can begin with blurry vision as the only symptom, but we need to get that message out to more people and as a reminder to other physicians. Mr. Innes had a rare abnormality in his carotid
artery. In most cases, the fleeting loss of vision is the result of a plaque that travels to the eye from a narrowed carotid artery or from an abnormal heart valve, temporarily blocking the small arteries that supply the retina. Such plaques can easily travel into the brain and result in a stroke. “Sudden loss of vision in one eye – even if temporary - should trigger an immediate trip to the emergency room for a detailed evaluation, rather than waiting for an elective ultrasound of the carotid artery or brain MRI that could be days or weeks away from being scheduled,” said Dr. Mark Moster, a neuro-ophthalmologist and neurologist with Wills Eye Hospital.

How many dangerous health issues involve or start with a visual symptom? Dr. Murchison and Dr. Pineda of the Thomas Jefferson University Health System are teaming up to begin a major research study to determine the answer.

“Not every case of blurry vision means a dire diagnosis, but when it’s in one eye or patients come in with sudden stabbing pain in their eye, double vision, or a sudden loss of vision, a more involved workup is required,” said Dr. Murchison.

Now that Mr. Innes is back at work reading reports, reviewing photos and documents, and meeting with clients, he’s certainly glad his one blurry eye cleared up so he can see now see fine detail and rest easier. As important is his advice to others, “Seeing an eye doctor helped save my life – so make an ophthalmologist your new best friend.”

#  #  #