

Eye clinic adds a new glaucoma specialist

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Adam Quinn, Hattiesburg Eye Clinic's new glaucoma specialist, was still unpacking his clinical office after relocating from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he had just completed a glaucoma fellowship. The next day the doctor would be seeing his first patients in South Mississippi.

"Let's just say it's going to be a full day," he said.

Quinn's opening patient load illustrates what the statistics tell us: Glaucoma is a leading cause of vision impairment in the United States, with the number of new cases increasing annually.

The disease is gradually robbing more than 3 million people in the U.S. of their sight. As many as a third may not know they have it.

But while the damage glaucoma causes is irreversible, specialists like Quinn can help slow the disease progression and help patients manage it more effectively.

Glaucoma is usually related to abnormally high pressure occurring in the intraocular fluid that fills the eye. Normally, excess fluid drains from the eye to help maintain a healthy pressure level.

But hereditary or environmental factors, injury and diseases like diabetes can interfere with the eyes' ability to drain excess fluid, which can then increase the overall pressure. Over time this high intraocular pressure can damage the optic nerve.

This disease progression can be happening early on without any symptoms like pain or vision impairment. But the damage is still occurring, and at some point, the patient will begin to notice



Adam Quinn, Hattiesburg Eye Clinic's new glaucoma specialist, works in the examining room. SUBMITTED

problems with their vision. Similar to cataracts, these effects become more noticeable later in life.

Glaucoma cases are now on the rise. As the percentage of the population over 50 continues to increase — as the "baby boom" generation enters its senior years — the prevalence of age-related diseases like glaucoma is sky-rocketing.

Ophthalmologists across the country are seeing a sharp hike in glaucoma cases, with many struggling to manage the swell.

Recognizing the need for advanced glaucoma care in South Mississippi, Hattiesburg Eye Clinic began looking some time ago for a specialist who could diagnose and treat glaucoma patients without the clinic having to refer patients to specialists in Jackson or New

Orleans.

"Similar to our approach with cataract treatment, we also wanted to provide more advanced care options for our patients struggling with glaucoma," said Stoney Williams, clinic ophthalmologist.

Around this same time, Quinn was looking for a career change that would bring him not only closer to his native Baton Rouge, Louisiana, but also provide him a challenge.

"My dad was a pediatrician for a small town outside Baton Rouge for many years and the only practicing pediatrician in that community," he said. "The impact he had on the lives of those families made a profound impression on me.

"I knew I wanted to practice medicine where there was a real need for what I

could offer."

After earning his undergraduate degree at Louisiana State University in 2009 and his medical degree in 2013, Quinn went on to complete his internship at Baptist Health System in Birmingham, Alabama and then his ophthalmology residency and glaucoma fellowship at the University of Alabama.

A friend told him about Hattiesburg Eye Clinic's interest in a glaucoma specialist, and he connected with the clinic and joined the group last month.

As a glaucoma specialist, Quinn performs traditional and newer innovative procedures that attempt to lower intraocular pressure.

Quinn also performs cataract surgeries, which for some patients may help improve their intraocular pressure.

"Although the causes for the two conditions are unrelated, cataracts in some glaucoma patients can further block the eye's drainage system and thus increase intraocular pressure," he said. "By performing cataract surgery earlier for these select patients, we may be able to reduce their intraocular pressure."

It's estimated that for every point lowered in intraocular pressure there's a 10 percent decrease in worsening symptoms from the disease. Quinn said that's why keeping intraocular pressure under control as early as possible in a patient's life is a primary goal of his specialty.

"It all begins with detecting elevated pressure during an eye exam," he said. "That's why we encourage everyone — especially those with a family history — to undergo an exam every year beginning by at least age 40.

"If caught early, we may be able to manage symptoms through medication. If the symptoms worsen, we may then consider other interventions like surgery to improve pressure."