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MEDIA RELEASE

Fight Age-Related Macular Degeneration with Antioxidants

Singapore – Antioxidants can help to maintain eye health and prevent the progression of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), but not enough eye patients are aware of the contents of the supplements they consume, according to a study conducted by eye specialists at Alexandra Health. The survey findings point to a need to raise awareness of safe and appropriate vitamin and supplementation for eye health – the focus of this year’s AMD Awareness Week campaign.

2 The theme for the campaign, which will run from 28 August to 3 September, is “Don’t Lose Sight of Age-Related Macular Degeneration”. In particular, the campaign will draw attention to the benefits of a specific combination of antioxidants recommended by the US-based National Eye Institute for patients with intermediate AMD or advanced AMD in one eye.

3 The events and activities that have been organised in conjunction with AMD Awareness Week 2010 include eye screenings at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH) and Jurong Medical Centre, as well as other locations across Singapore, for a nominal fee. Free public forums on AMD in various languages and AMD patient support group meetings will also be held. Details are available at www.ktph.com.sg

4 The highlight of the campaign is an exhibition of 16 paintings by award-winning London-based artist Adam Hahn, which will be displayed in Singapore for the first time at KTPH’s Learning Centre during AMD Awareness Week. Mr Hahn’s works depict how patients with varying severities of AMD see the world. The exhibition is open to public and is free.

5 “There is a need to increase awareness of various antioxidant supplements available for AMD. Our campaign will try to educate the patients and public about nutritional aspects of AMD. The exact nature of visual disability faced by patients with AMD is often not well appreciated by their family, friends and society. We hope that the art exhibition will help the public and caregivers understand the

disease better from the patient's perspective," said Dr Ajeet M. Wagle, Consultant, Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, KTPH and Chairman of the AMD Awareness Week 2010 campaign.

6 AMD Awareness Week 2010 is jointly organised by Alexandra Health with AMD Alliance International, Health Promotion Board, Macular Degeneration Society, Singapore, Singapore Optometric Association, Singapore Opticianry Practitioners, Singapore Polytechnic Optometry Centre, NHG Eye Institute, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore Action Group of Elders, People's Association, and many community centres throughout Singapore.

Antioxidants and AMD

7 AMD is a severe eye disease characterised by progressive degeneration of the macula, a small spot in the centre of the retina that is responsible for fine, sharp, straight-ahead vision. In developed countries, AMD is the most common cause of blindness among people aged over 60. It is likely to become one of the leading causes of vision loss in elderly Singaporeans. The OVS department at KTPH sees about 100 new cases of AMD every month.

8 Vitamins and antioxidants have an important role to play in eye health. A study conducted by the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences (OVS) at KTPH showed that 41 per cent of the 411 randomly selected eye patients surveyed at the Eye Clinic at Alexandra Hospital were consuming vitamin supplements. Of these, 12.4 per cent were consuming supplements for eye health. Only 4.7 per cent of those consuming supplements were aware of the contents of the supplements that they were taking and less than half of the respondents had consulted a specialist or general practitioner before taking the supplements.

9 The combination of antioxidants that has been found effective in preventing the degenerative progression of intermediate AMD or advanced AMD in one eye to more severe forms comprises Vitamin C (500mg), Vitamin E (400IU), beta-carotene (15mg) and zinc (80mg) and is based on the recommendations of the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) conducted by the US-based National Eye Institute.

10 AMD patients should consult their eye specialist before taking the formulation as it contains very high doses of antioxidants which may interfere with medications and interact with other nutrients to decrease absorption into the body. Patients who are being treated for chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes should also consult their doctors before taking the formulation.

11 Patients with good ocular health or early AMD are advised not to take the AREDS formulation as it does not prevent AMD or reduce the risk of progression in patients with early AMD.

However, eating dark-coloured vegetables and fruits such as spinach, pumpkin, green leafy vegetables, kiwi and grapes have been associated with better vision and lower risk of developing AMD.

12 AMD Awareness Week 2010 was launched today by Dr Lam Pin Min, Member of Parliament Ang Mo Kio GRC.