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**AMMC URGES PERSONS NOT TO LOSE SIGHT OF GLAUCOMA**

**PARAGOULD, AR** -- Grass, the sky, a family member's smile...these are things that most of us are lucky to see every day, because of the gift of sight, a gift that is sometimes taken for granted. There are many eye diseases that can rob us of this precious gift, and glaucoma is one of them.

As January is "Glaucoma Awareness Month," Arkansas Methodist Medical Center (AMMC) wants to remind people of the importance of getting their eyes checked and screened for glaucoma to protect and preserve their vision.

Dr. Lowell Hardcastle, an ophthalmologist with AMMC explains that glaucoma is a group of eye diseases in which the normal fluid pressure inside the eye slowly rises, prompting a gradual loss of optic nerve fibers, leading to vision loss, or even blindness. According to the National Eye Institute, glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness in the United States, with open-angle glaucoma, where a person's side or peripheral vision gradually decreases and is lost over time, the most common form of the disease.

Dr. Hardcastle notes that while glaucoma is a genetic disease, anyone can have glaucoma. However, African-Americans over the age of 40, everyone over the age of 65, especially Mexican-Americans and persons with a family history of glaucoma are particularly at risk.

Initially, there may be no symptoms of glaucoma, however, as the disease progresses, persons may notice their side vision gradually failing – while objects in the direct field of vision may be clear, objects to the side may be missed.

Prevent Blindness America, the nation's leading volunteer eye-health organization calls glaucoma the "sneak thief of sight," because many people usually do not notice any signs of the disease until they

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have already lost some of their vision. In fact, the organization estimates that some 2.2 million Americans 40 and older have open-angle glaucoma and half don't even know they have it.

While there is no cure for glaucoma, if the disease is caught early it can be treated with medications or surgery to preserve a person's sight.

"Glaucoma is treated and controllable with eye drops, with relatively few persons needing surgery," Dr. Hardcastle says.

Dr. Hardcastle recommends that everyone be screened for glaucoma. "Persons with a family history of the disease should be checked annually. For everyone else, it's a good idea to have a glaucoma screening every two to three years."

Arkansas Methodist Medical Center is a 129-bed, fully JCAHO accredited, not-for-profit medical center. AMMC has touched thousands of lives since 1949 as a Beacon of Health, Hope and Healing. Additional AMMC information is available at [www.arkansasmethodist.org](http://www.arkansasmethodist.org).

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**Cutline: Lowell Hardcastle, M.D. Ophthalmologist, Arkansas Methodist Medical Center**