

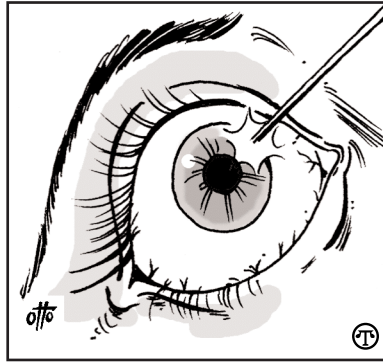
Laser Therapy Slows Vision Loss And Shines The Light On A Galaxy Of Medical And Cosmetic Conditions

(NAPSA)—Scientists are shining new light on a galaxy of medical and cosmetic conditions these days. Consider the case of Jennifer Simons. At age 62, she developed a disturbing vision problem—straight lines began to appear wavy. At first she chalked it up to aging but when her vision also became spotty, she consulted an ophthalmologist.

In a routine eye exam, her eye doctor detected tiny deposits under her retina that signaled age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Further testing revealed she had a form of the disease called wet AMD, in which abnormal blood vessels grow under the retina and cause leaking fluid to lift it away from the underlying eye layer. The condition is the leading cause of major vision loss in people over 60 with an estimated 1.3 million people in the U.S. at risk for developing wet AMD. While there is no cure, advances in laser technology have produced treatments that slow its progress.

Fortunately, Simons' ophthalmologist specializes in laser therapy and recommended photodynamic laser therapy (PDT). The FDA-approved treatment uses a low-level laser to activate a photosensitive dye that is injected into the arm. The dye adheres to the lining of the abnormal blood vessels and is turned on by the laser, producing a chemical reaction that closes the damaged blood vessels and reduces leaking fluid.

"On average, patients experienced improvement for approximately four to eight weeks following one treatment," says Anita Agarwal, M.D., a spokesperson



for the American Society for Laser Medicine and Surgery (ASLMS) who presented results of her PDT study at this year's scientific meeting. "However, most patients required two or more treatments repeated every 90 days for stabilization. Still, our research demonstrates that PDT is safe and moderately effective in slowing the progression of this irreversible disease," she added.

"PDT is one of the newest laser applications that is proving beneficial for various conditions—from eye disease and breast cancer detection to the treatment of precancerous lesions, acne and sun-damaged skin," said Roy G. Geronemus, M.D., president of the ASLMS. "Laser technology has never been more exacting or precise, with pinpoint procedures so specific and targeted that many medical therapies and cosmetic problems can be improved in one simple trip to the doctor's office."

Today, lasers have revolutionized patient care and have become the gold standard for many stubborn or previously difficult-to-fix dermatology conditions, including wrinkles, scars, vein disorders,

birthmarks, hair removal and unwanted tattoos, among others. "Lasers and other energy sources offer non-invasive solutions that don't require incisions, scalpel surgery and extensive recovery periods," added Dr. Geronemus. "In most cases, these procedures can be performed using only topical or local anesthesia, providing increased safety, enhanced accuracy, less bleeding and faster healing than is generally the case with conventional surgery."

As with most diseases, the best way to slow down or correct eye problems is early detection and treatment. People at risk for vision problems should:

- Ask your primary care physician to examine your eyes as part of your regular checkup.
- Visit your optometrist or ophthalmologist for an annual eye exam.
- Report any problems or changes in vision to your doctor immediately.
- Check if laser therapy is appropriate for your specific condition.
- Make sure that a qualified and trained professional is administering the laser treatment.
- Discuss your medical history with your physician, including pre-existing conditions, medications you are taking and any familial disorders.

The American Society for Laser Medicine and Surgery is a valuable resource for laser research, safety, education and clinical knowledge. For more information and referrals to laser experts, you can log on to the Society's Web site: www.aslms.org.