



## World Ophthalmology Congress 2010

### One US Dollar can save eyesight

Initiative VISION 2020 fights avoidable blindness

**Berlin, May 2010 – Worldwide there are over 30 million blind people; around one million of them are children. 80% of all causes of blindness are avoidable, often without great financial outlay. Under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO), Initiative VISION 2020 has been working for the past ten years to overcome avoidable blindness by the year 2020. Ophthalmologists will review the first interim results at the World Ophthalmology Congress (WOC® 2010) taking place in Berlin in June.**

VISION 2020 is a joint program run by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). The initiative receives support from non-governmental organizations from all over the world. "The initiative has three main aims: on the one hand, it is all about getting eye diseases under control worldwide. Closely connected with this aim are the establishment of effective infrastructure for ophthalmological care and treatment, and the training and re-training of doctors and specialist staff," explains Professor Dr. med. Günther Rudolph, senior physician at the University Eye Hospital, Ludwig Maximilians University (LMU) in Munich. 2020 stands not only for the time schedule of the initiative but also for 20/20, a term used by ophthalmologists for 100% visual acuity.

The initiative places particular emphasis on the prevention of blindness in children. Prevention and therapy would have saved the eyesight of every second blind child," Rudolph states in the run-up to the WOC® 2010. For these children blindness is not only a matter of not being able to see. It is associated with the additional risk of higher mortality in the early years of life. Moreover, the majority of these patients are denied the opportunity of a school education or vocational training.

The causes of childhood blindness differ in poor and developed countries. In poor countries the main causes are corneal scarring caused by Vitamin A deficiency, cataract and glaucoma. Further, many children go blind as a result of a dysfunction of the optic nerve or after a measles infection. "In the

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sub-Saharan region and in parts of Asia, blindness and associated premature mortality could be reduced significantly by the twice-yearly administration of Vitamin A," Rudolph reports. "The cost per child is only about one US Dollar."

In industrial countries the most common causes of blindness are retinal damage in premature babies, so-called premature retinopathy, genetic eye diseases and glaucoma. According to Rudolph, progress has been made here too. "The chance of successful therapy can be enhanced by the administration of drugs directly into the eye," the expert explains. Premature retinopathy is prevalent in infants born before the 32<sup>nd</sup> week of pregnancy or who weigh less than 1,500 grams at birth.

"Since its inception ten years ago, VISION 2020 has made notable progress," states Rudolph, who will be reviewing the interim results with his colleagues at the WOC® 2010. German doctors have for some time also been deeply engaged in the transfer of knowledge to developing countries. The German Society of Ophthalmology (DOG) has provided the means for the training of African ophthalmologists, for example. The LMU Munich cooperates with the University of Nairobi. "Since 1978, more than 100 ophthalmologists from more than ten African states have received training through this partnership, which was set up and is supported in the main by Professor Volker Klauß," explains Rudolph.

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*Germany plays host in 2010 to the largest international ophthalmologic congress with the World Ophthalmology Congress (WOC® 2010). In addition to the International Congress of Ophthalmology (ICO), the Annual Congress of the German Society of Ophthalmology (DOG) and the German Academy of Ophthalmology (AAD) will take place under the umbrella of WOC® 2010. From 3 to 6 June, 2010, AAD courses will be held in German. The international program in English will follow from 5 to 9 June. The organizers expect over 10,000 attendees from some 120 countries.*