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Executive Summary: National Survey Results Americans, Eye Health and Eye Disease

To: American Academy of Ophthalmology

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

Despite the fact that nearly 75 percent of adults in the United States correct their vision and that 50 percent of people will suffer from either cataracts or glaucoma by the time they are 80 years of age, people know strikingly little about age-related eye disease.¹ Few see themselves at risk for age-related eye disease, and vision loss or going blind are relatively low on the list of their health concerns. Even more striking, people with eye afflictions in their family know relatively little about the risk factors associated with common eye diseases and are not more likely to get routine exams than those who do not.

People's awareness and understanding of age-related eye diseases can be raised through a public education campaign aimed at promoting an understanding of the risks of eye disease and the role that ophthalmologists play in treating eye disease. The most compelling way to raise awareness and understanding of eye disease is by focusing on the consequences of eye disease - primarily the major life changes that come with vision loss - and the need to understand risk and family history to make sure that people can slow the progress of age-related eye diseases that have no cure. This framework moves people broadly towards becoming more concerned about and gaining a greater sense of being at risk for age-related eye disease.

The following memo is based on a nationally representative survey conducted among 802 people aged 18 years and older and an over-sample of 398 women aged 40-65 years (reaching a total of 581 women ages 40-65). The survey has a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points, while the over-sample has a margin of error of +/- 4.1 percentage points. Both samples were stratified geographically and used random digit dial methodology. This memo also incorporates findings from four focus groups conducted with women ages 35-65 in Washington DC and San Francisco.

¹ Vision Council of America. June 2006 *Vision Watch* data.

Key Findings

- Few people see themselves as truly at risk for eye disease (11 percent feel they are at high risk, 28 percent high or medium risk) Perception of risk does increase with age and among people who have a history of eye disease in their families. However, only 17 percent of people who report having eye disease in their family say they are at high risk for eye disease.
- Going blind and vision loss rank relatively low on the list of people's health concerns; 23 percent say they are very concerned about losing their vision (43 percent concerned overall). Rather, weight gain, joint and back pain and cancer are all of greater concern.
- When it comes to their knowledge of risk factors of age-related eye disease, most Americans fail to correctly identify the risks. People know relatively little about eye diseases and the risks associated with them. Respondents were asked to identify risk factors for age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and dry eye. Only 15 percent can correctly identify 11-20 risk factors, 40 percent can correctly identify 6-10 risk factors and 45 percent correctly identify 0-5 risk factors. People can most accurately guess the risk factors associated with cataracts, but knowledge drops off precipitously when it comes to diabetic retinopathy, dry eye, glaucoma, and age related macular degeneration.
- People with a family history of eye disease, who are more at risk for certain eye diseases, are unaware of the factors that make them susceptible to eye disease. In fact, they do not know more about the risk factors associated with age-related eye disease than those with no history of eye disease. Only 16 percent of people with eye disease in the family can correctly identify 11-20 risk factors, versus 14 percent of those without a family history of eye disease.
- Though the sample size is small, African Americans and Hispanics, who are particularly at risk for glaucoma, are not more attentive to their eye health (they are also less likely to have vision coverage as part of their health insurance). For instance, despite the fact that African Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans are at risk for glaucoma, only 24 percent of people in these minority groups know that race is a risk factor for this disease.
- People without glasses (28 percent overall) do very little to take care of their eye health and do not see themselves at risk for age-related eye disease. People who do not need their vision corrected are the least likely to regularly get eye exams – only 21 percent of people without glasses get exams yearly. Also, people without glasses do not particularly see themselves at risk for age-related eye disease (14 percent high or medium risk for people without glasses versus 34 percent high or medium risk for people with glasses).
- While seniors are more engaged with their eye health and are more likely to think of themselves as at risk for age-related eye disease, one third of seniors are still not getting yearly eye exams.
- The strongest public education message suggest that vision loss and blindness mean significant life changes that include not being able to live as one is accustomed to, as well as greater dependence and reliance on others. It is also important to educate

people about their risk for age-related eye diseases, as many cannot actually be cured but the progress of the disease can be slowed. Despite the fact that the information is broadly compelling, women aged 40-65 years stand out as a particular target. These women are the primary health decision makers in the home, they are more attentive and attuned to their families' health, including greater familiarity with family health history, and they are more likely to get screenings if they know their family has a history of eye disease.

Appendix A: Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. designed and administered this telephone survey conducted by professional interviewers. Telephone numbers were generated by a random digit dial process, thereby allowing access to all listed and unlisted phones. The survey reached 1,200 adults, 18 years or older, including 581 women ages 40-65. The survey was conducted June 5-12, 2007. The data were weighted by gender, race, education, and region to ensure an accurate reflection of the population. The sample size with these weights applied is 800. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points, while the oversample of women 40-65 has a margin of error of +/- 4.1 percentage points. Additionally, four focus groups were conducted with women ages 35-65 in Washington DC and San Francisco.