

Extended trial to fight macular degeneration

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a leading cause of blindness in people in the western world over the age of 50 and South Africa is poised to be the recipient of a new laser therapy.

Coherent Medical Group of California announced this week that 150 Coherent Opal photoactivator lasers will be delivered for an extended trial to retinal specialists throughout the world. The Opal is part of the new therapy for AMD and the clinical sites will be in keeping with a US Federal Drug Association investigation.

There are few treatment options available to patients diagnosed with AMD and the new therapy has the potential to treat cases of choroidal neovascularisation without damaging the overlying retinal structures.

AMD is characterised by a dry form and a more severe wet

form. While the wet form accounts for about 15 percent of all AMD cases, it is responsible for 90 percent of the severe vision loss associated with this condition.

The wet form is caused by the growth of abnormal blood vessels across the macula, the central part of the retina. These abnormal vessels leak fluid and blood into the tissue at the back of the eye, causing a blister to form in the retina, which eventually leads to scar tissue and a loss of central vision.

AMD symptoms may include either rapid severe vision loss or gradual vision loss; dim or distorted vision; a blind spot or dark empty area in the centre of the vision field; and straight lines look wavy.

The Coherent Medical Group is represented in South Africa by MCM Health Care.

Painless testing for pre-school children

Most children only undergo an eye test when they are old enough to read a Snellen chart and this is too late for most childhood vision disorders.

According to Therese Stewart, the director of Eye Screening Services, there is now a portable eye screening device which solves the problem.

The computerised MTI Phoscreener was specifically developed by a paediatric ophthalmologist and it takes photographs without making contact with the eye.

"This means no eye drops or

head restraints, which are such a trial for pre-schoolers."

The photographs are analysed with the use of a checklist for refractive errors. These include myopia, hyperopia, strabismus, media opacities and astigmatism.

"If necessary the child is referred to an ophthalmologist and we are setting up a referral system which includes paediatricians, pharmacists and ophthalmologists," said Stewart.

The test is available country-wide at selected pharmacies or at nursery schools.

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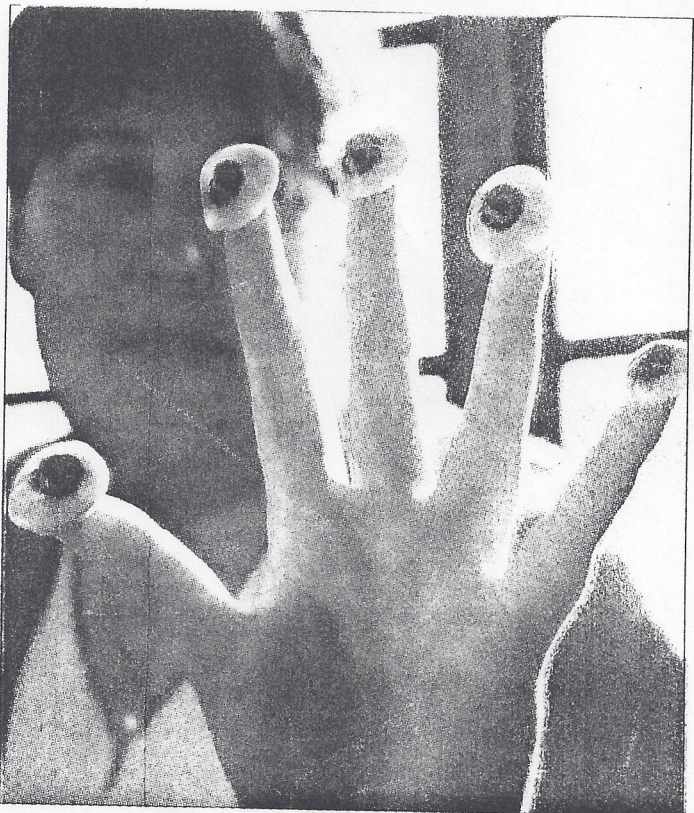
SURVEY

World Retina Day

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Making ocular art accurately



MODEL PUPILS: Some of the artificial eyes which can each take up to a day to create

An artificial eye can cost as much as R7000 and takes a day to make, according to an artificial eye technician.

Beryl Carvalho says the challenge is to produce a custom-made eye that is a real joy to the wearer and the first step is to take an impression of the eye

socket. "The iris is hand painted and we cure an acrylic which we copy from the white of the patient's eye.

"Using polyester thread, we copy the patient's veins and then we overlay the whole eye with clear plastic to give it a lifelike shine."

CLASSIC Eyes