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**Volunteer Newsletter Update from Marian Williams (Regional Manager North Wales) July 2022.**

Hello everyone,

I hope you are all keeping well and enjoying the glorious sunshine.

**Partnership calls to combat eye treatment delays**

The Macular Society is working closely with health bodies across Wales in order to help them combat delays to eye care treatment in the country.

Wait times for eye treatments hit the headlines this week when Gwyn Williams, of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, said the wait times for key injections, such as those for wet AMD, have become the “biggest they had ever seen.”

Macular Society Senior Regional Manager Adele Francis (South Wales) and Regional Manager Marian Williams (North Wales) sit on different boards, where they are able to feedback concerns and thoughts from people they meet at their various support groups up and down the country.

Adele is also part of an eye care collaboration group, as a representative of the collective patient voice, made up of consultants and managers, who have been working to ensure as many patients are seen in as timely a manner as possible. A request has been made to find out what initiatives are underway among the different health boards to improve treatment delays.

Adele said: “Being close to the people who need the care and support and then reporting back to the collaboration groups, we are trying to make a difference. We’re ensuring people’s concerns are being heard so we can play our role in tackling the delays.

“We know wait times have been a problem for a while and we are asking what more can be done to combat the issue, what initiatives are being worked on.”

Transferring patients for quicker treatments elsewhere, mobile treatment units and more trained nurses to give the injections have all been mentioned among health professionals.

Chief Executive of the Macular Society Cathy Yelf said: “These are not new ideas but if these haven’t been implemented in Wales already then we really need to see the foot on the pedal. It’s not an easy turnaround though because injections into the eye are a highly delicate and professional procedure.

“If the NHS can’t cope with the number of patients then they should be assessing the risk of each patient, and find an alternative place for their treatment. This can’t wait, this is an urgent situation and people will lose their vision if they are not treated properly.”

**Befriending**

The befriending service continues to be in high demand, with a significant number of people now waiting to be matched. We're looking for befriending volunteers who are able to dedicate more time, to take on an increased number of befriendees. Additional support will be provided by the befriending team, to find out how you can help call 01264 326 622 or e-mail befriending@macularsociety.org

**Skills for Seeing**

We continue to offer our Skills for Seeing service via telephone and digitally and are now recruiting more volunteers to take on this rewarding role. By offering guidance on lighting and low vision aids, and teaching eccentric viewing techniques, you can support people in maximising their remaining vision and their confidence. For more information, call 01264 326 622 or e-mail skills@macularsociety.org

**Research news**

**Eat for your eyes - how food is important for our sight**

What are the best foods to eat to look after your eyes?

Whether you have macular disease, or know someone in your family who is affected, you will have no doubt read lots of conflicting advice about diet, supplements and the best things to eat for your eyes.

**Why is diet so important?**

Every minute our cells undergo ‘oxidation’ as they complete the chemical processes needed to maintain life. As a result, potentially harmful waste substances known as ‘free radicals’ are released.

In response, our body sends antioxidants to ‘mop’ these up as part of our natural defence. As one of the most metabolically active parts of our body, the retina is particularly susceptible to oxidation. And, as we age, the process of clearing the waste becomes less efficient.

When the number of free radicals outweigh our ability to neutralise them, our cells can be harmed by ‘oxidative stress’. This is when ‘drusen’, yellow deposits at the back of the eye, may collect.

Fruit, vegetables, spices and herbs contain a wide range of beneficial antioxidants. Those that have been shown to be important for eyes include vitamin C, vitamin E, zinc, copper, lutein and zeaxanthin. When absorbed from food, lutein and zeaxanthin are delivered direct to the back of the eye. Lutein converts to mesozeaxanthin, which is found in the fovea, the central part of the macula responsible for our most detailed vision. As these nutrients are yellow, they are good for screening out the damaging blue wavelengths of light.

**What does the science say?**

Running for six years, the AREDS trial focused on patients with intermediate age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Results showed that after five years of zinc and antioxidant supplements, the progression of AMD can be slowed down for some people by about 25%. The AREDS formula can be found in many supplements. But it’s important that you talk to your doctor before taking supplements, as some medications might interact.

**Top takeaway tips to take care of your eyes**

**Get your daily lutein**

Lutein is found in spinach, kale, red pepper and egg yolk. Steam or lightly cook your greens and serve with a little butter, olive oil or oily fish. Use greens in smoothies or freeze and crumble into soups.

**Fill up on antioxidants**

The government recommends five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. These are full of antioxidants and remember to select a variety of colours.

**Look after your blood vessels**

Healthy blood vessels effectively deliver oxygen and nutrients to the retina. Bolster your blood vessels with daily exercise, plenty of sleep and good hydration and reduce your intake of saturated fats and salt.

**Keep a healthy lifestyle**

Risk factors for AMD include being overweight, smoking and going out in the sun without protective sunglasses.

**New Lucentis biosimilar, Ongavia, which is now ready for use**

Ongavia is a newly available drug for wet AMD being rolled out for use across the UK. It is a biosimilar to Lucentis (ranibizumab) and is licenced to treat several macular conditions.

Lucentis is a widely used anti-VEGF drug in the treatment of wet AMD, administered by intra-vitreal injection every 8-12 weeks. It works by preventing further blood vessel growth in the macula and has been found to be highly effective for most users. Biosimilars are drugs with a similar chemical make-up that offer significant cost reductions but no discernible loss of effectivity. In the research on this drug it was found that Ongavia was comparable with Lucentis in terms of success rates and frequency of adverse reaction.

Ongavia is licenced for use in treating a number of other conditions such as diabetic macular oedema (DME), proliferative diabetic retinopathy (PDR); macular oedema as a secondary condition to retinal vein occlusion (branch RVO or central RVO); and choroidal neovascularisation (CNV).

Other Lucentis biosimilars are expected to become available soon, with Byooviz (produced by Samsung Bioepis) expected next year, as well as biosimiliars to Eylea in a few years time.

If you would like further information about any of the topics raised in the newsletter, please contact me on **07494 054 053** or you can ring the Advice and Information number on **0300 3030 111**.

Best wishes, Marian.