

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement: Screening for Glaucoma

WASHINGTON, D.C. – July 9, 2013 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today released its final recommendation statement on screening for glaucoma.

The Task Force found that there was not enough evidence to determine the accuracy and effectiveness of glaucoma screening in primary care settings for adults who do not have vision problems. Based on this lack of clear evidence, the Task Force cannot make a recommendation for or against screening adults for glaucoma at this time. Therefore, the Task Force issued an I statement.

“Glaucoma is a serious disease that can cause vision problems and blindness in millions of Americans,” says Task Force co-vice chairman Albert Siu, M.D., M.S.P.H. “Unfortunately, we don’t have enough evidence to know how best to screen for the disease and who would benefit from screening in the primary care setting.”

The Task Force’s evidence review focused on primary open-angle glaucoma, which is the most common form of the disease. It affects about 2.5 million Americans, with older adults and African Americans at a higher risk of developing glaucoma. This form of glaucoma progresses slowly, and people may not detect symptoms of gradual vision loss until the disease is advanced.

It is important to note that this recommendation applies specifically to screening adults without vision problems in primary care settings. People with vision problems should continue to see their primary care clinician or eye care specialist to determine which tests and treatments they need. In the absence of definitive evidence for glaucoma screening in primary care for people without vision problems, doctors and patients may choose to rely on expert guidance to decide what is best for the patient’s needs.

While there are many new treatments for glaucoma, the USPSTF found that there is not enough evidence to determine how best to screen for and diagnose glaucoma in adults with no signs or symptoms of vision problems. Also, there is a lack of evidence showing that screening reduces the likelihood of vision loss and blindness.

“We call on the health care community to conduct critically needed research on effective screening tests and treatments for glaucoma,” Siu says. “Findings from new research may be able to improve the lives of many Americans and help the Task Force update its recommendation in the future.”

The Task Force’s final recommendation statement is published online in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and is available on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available. Before finalizing this recommendation, the USPSTF posted a draft version for public comment in February 2013.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based

recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

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