

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – February 19, 2013 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF or Task Force) today posted a draft statement on screening for glaucoma in adults without vision problems. The Task Force is providing an opportunity for public comment on this draft recommendation through March 18. All public comments will be considered as the Task Force develops its final recommendation.

The most common form of glaucoma affects about 2.5 million Americans and is a leading cause of blindness. Glaucoma progresses slowly, and people may not notice symptoms until serious vision loss occurs.

The USPSTF could not determine whether screening adults without vision problems in primary care improves their long-term health and prevents blindness. This is because of inadequate evidence on the best ways to screen and diagnose glaucoma and the current lack of evidence that screening reduces the likelihood of vision loss and blindness. Based on this lack of clear evidence, the Task Force cannot make a recommendation for or against screening adults for glaucoma at this time.

“Glaucoma is a very serious disease for many Americans, but gaps in the available evidence on the value of screening prevent us from making a recommendation,” said Task Force co-vice chairman Albert Siu, M.D., M.S.P.H.

It is important to note this draft statement applies only to adults without vision problems. People with vision problems should certainly 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 that glaucoma screening is effective in people without vision problems, doctors and patients may choose to rely on expert guidance to decide what is best for the patient’s needs.

The Task Force calls on the health care community to prioritize research on the basic science of glaucoma, the establishment of diagnostic standards, effective screening tests, and safe and effective treatments to determine if screening all adults would be beneficial.

“Investments in glaucoma research may lead to improved vision for Americans and to a clear recommendation from the USPSTF in the future,” Siu said.

The Task Force’s draft statement has been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from February 19 through March 18 at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm.

The Task Force is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine who work 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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