



MEDIA RELEASE

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Getting a sporting chance to beat a silent robber of sight

A chance encounter with a Kiwi sporting legend and his wife saved Andy Dickerson's eyesight from serious damage.

Sports fan Andy spotted former cricketer Sir Richard Hadlee and his wife Dianne on the front cover of the *New Zealand Women's Weekly* when he was searching for something to read at the hairdresser.

Richard and Dianne are Glaucoma New Zealand Ambassadors and the pair were encouraging people to get their eyes tested regularly.

Andy decided to heed that advice and in early 2016 he was diagnosed with primary open angle glaucoma – a condition with no early symptoms that could have made him blind.

"This came as a shock to me as I had always had very good eyesight, no symptoms and no family history. Glaucoma was the last thing in the world I expected to be diagnosed with," Andy says.

"Without that eye examination, I could have had irreversible damage to my eyes by the time symptoms began to appear."

Andy, a Canterbury District Health Board member, says like many people in Christchurch his home was badly damaged in the earthquakes and it took years to resolve insurance issues. He then moved to North Canterbury. It was during this unsettling period he let his eye appointments slip.

"I've worked in the health sector my whole career – I should have known better. I should have had an eye test much sooner."

He's sharing his story in support of July's Glaucoma New Zealand Awareness Appeal in the hope he can convince others to get their eyes checked, and donate to the charity.

"I am asking everyone to support Glaucoma New Zealand and help get the message out there in our communities and workplaces that regular eye tests can save your sight."

Andy says his prognosis is good because he sticks to a daily routine of taking prescribed eye drops and keeping up with eye checks.

"I am very hopeful of keeping my sight if I continue with the treatment. At 54 years of age there is always the chance a better treatment will be developed in the future. I consider myself extremely lucky."

Sir Richard says diary an eye appointment today!

Sir Richard Hadlee says it's "a great feeling" that he and Dianne can make a difference through their roles as ambassadors for Glaucoma New Zealand.

"You have to keep your eye on the ball when it comes to your health checks," Richard says.

"Men can be blazé and think: 'she'll be right mate' – but then one day things might not be right. You can't afford to be macho about it, you have to get the checks done.

"There are no excuses. Make an eye appointment and put it in your diary."

Glaucoma is the leading cause of preventable blindness in New Zealand.

"Eyesight is so important because you want to be able to see the world and your grandkids," Richard says.

Richard says his late mother Lilla's sudden blindness in one eye in 2004 made him aware of the impact of eye conditions.

"It makes you sit up and take notice. It shows how vulnerable we are," Richard says.

"I had open heart surgery in 1991 and I was given another chance. It taught me respect for life and to make the most of your life. Your health is a very important thing to protect."

Richard says Glaucoma New Zealand's annual appeal is a great cause to support because there is no cure and funding research is vitally important.

Donations can be made via Glaucoma New Zealand's website www.glaucoma.org.nz or by visiting your nearest ASB Bank branch during July. Participating optometrists, ophthalmologists and pharmacies will also have Glaucoma NZ collection boxes in July.

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About Glaucoma New Zealand and glaucoma

Glaucoma New Zealand is a non-government funded trust and relies on public donations, sponsorship, grants and fundraising.

It aims to eliminate blindness from glaucoma through: supporting research in New Zealand, raising public awareness, supporting people with glaucoma and helping with education of health professionals.

For more information phone 0800 452 826 or email info@glaucoma.org.nz or visit www.glaucoma.org.nz

Glaucoma New Zealand recommends an eye examination for glaucoma every five years from the age of 45 and every three years from the age of 60. However, at any age, if you notice changes in your eyesight, you should have your eyes examined immediately.

Glaucoma is the name given to a group of eye diseases where the optic nerve at the back of the eye is slowly destroyed.

It's estimated half of those with glaucoma don't know they have it.

"Glaucoma is the leading cause of preventable blindness. What makes glaucoma unique is that if glaucoma is diagnosed early and treatment started in a timely fashion, blindness becomes rare," Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer, Chair of Glaucoma New Zealand, says.

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