What is the Cost of Vision Impairment and How Can We Reduce It?

Call to action from the Expert Meeting organized by the Bulgarian Association of Pharmacoeconomics and the ISPOR Bulgarian Chapter on June 19, 2024, in Sofia.

- **Make integrated eye care a national health priority** and take measures for early detection of vision impairment in both children and adults.
- **Implement current recommendations for prevention** - screening and early diagnosis, as well as timely treatment of eye diseases according to current standards, which can prevent significant costs and losses to the economy.
- **Make informed decisions** based on collected and analyzed data from real clinical practice, and improve public awareness of these diseases, seeking feedback from citizens.

Integrating eye care in the health system as a national health priority was presented as a strategic direction with a proposal for specific activities aimed at creating a **National Eye Care Program** and a **National Prevention Center**, responsible for early detection of vision problems in both children and adults.

The experience of patient organizations like Retina International and its European members, including Retina Bulgaria, can support this process. The formed Retina Action Coalition created a Manifesto based on scientific data and the real experience of people affected by age-related macular degeneration. The Manifesto outlines the main guidelines for developing eye health policies focused on people with age-related macular degeneration in Europe: (1) early detection and access to treatment and rehabilitation; (2) scientific research and innovations; (3) mental health.

Implementing current recommendations for prevention - screening and early diagnosis, as well as timely treatment of eye diseases according to modern standards, should start from early

childhood. Pilot projects, primarily in Sofia, provide basic guidelines on how this can be practically achieved. Additional focus is needed on rare pediatric eye diseases - their early detection and specialized treatment.

The National Eye Care Program should cover the entire population, not just at-risk patients, and directly engage healthcare professionals in outpatient care. Eye care should be considered in the context of an overall assessment of citizens' health status and include regulated activities for health promotion and prevention. Quality control of health services is a key factor in achieving specific health outcomes and economic benefits for society.

Implementing specific policies in the field of eye care cannot be done aimlessly. Informed decisions based on collected and analyzed data from real clinical practice are needed, along with improving public awareness of these diseases and seeking feedback from citizens. Here is where new digital technologies and partnerships with engaged non-governmental and business organizations play a role.

Participants

- Prof. Genka Petrova, PhD
- Prof. Kostadin Angelov, MD
- Prof. Alexander Oscar, MD
- Prof. Zdravko Kamenov, PhD
- Prof. Maria Dimitrova, PhD
- Prof. Maria Kamusheva, PhD
- Assoc. Prof. Radka Goranova, PhD
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nikolay Hristov, MD
- Dr. Daria Petkova, MD
- Assoc. Prof. Konstantin Tashkov, PhD
- Dr. Alexander Simidchiev, MD
- Dr. Petya Stratieva, MD
- Dr. Rosen Dimitrov, MD

"The call to governments is to adopt a comprehensive approach to eye health and make it a priority. During the discussion, participants agreed on the need to create current recommendations for prevention, timely diagnosis, and appropriate and timely treatment according to modern standards and the development of a national program. Experts emphasized the importance of collecting and analyzing data from real practice and improving public awareness of these diseases."