

## Bringing Eye Care To The Elderly Worldwide

(NAPSA)—Medical experts and service organizations are keeping a close watch on two trends—the aging of the Earth’s population and an increase in the number of age-related vision problems among the elderly worldwide. These vision problems are particularly evident in low-income countries.

According to the World Health Organization, there are an estimated 45 million people worldwide who are blind; 80 percent are over age 50 and three-quarters of them could have avoided their blindness if they had been properly diagnosed or treated.

It’s also been noted by ORBIS, a nonprofit, global development organization that focuses its efforts on improving access to quality eye care, that 71 percent of the world’s elderly and 90 percent of blind people live in developing countries.

At the same time, serving the elderly population of low-income countries comes with specific challenges that have to be addressed, such as the cost of vision care and related expenses, including transportation and support of caretakers, a fear of eye surgery among older people, and an ability to communicate with seniors about how to address treatable eye conditions.

In addition, vision impairment often contributes to injuries and mortality in older people. The good news is that timely intervention can delay the effects of age-related blinding conditions.

ORBIS is working with other eye care groups under the global VISION 2020 “The Right To Sight” initiative and committed corporate sponsors like Alcon, the world’s largest eye care company, to implement innovative programs to drastically reduce avoidable blindness, which is defined as



**In three-quarters of cases, sight loss results from preventable or treatable causes.**

blindness that could have been either treated or prevented by known, cost-effective means.

According to Dr. Hunter Cherek, medical director, ORBIS International, “In a world in which populations are living longer than ever, the risk of eye diseases associated with aging, such as cataract and macular degeneration, is growing rapidly. VISION 2020, ORBIS and Alcon are working towards greater public awareness of eye health issues. We do this through advocacy and skills-exchange programs essential to delivering quality eye care services.”

This approach targets conditions such as cataract, trachoma, uncorrected refractive error, low vision and, among the elderly, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and age-related macular degeneration.

These efforts are dedicated to building up the long-term capabilities of local eye care institutions, working with local and national governments, as well as private-sector, community-based and non-governmental organizations, so local partners can provide quality eye care services that are affordable, accessible and sustainable.

To learn more, visit the Web site at [www.orbis.org](http://www.orbis.org).