**Patient information factsheet**

**Acute ischaemic optic neuropathy (AION)**

**What is acute ischaemic optic neuropathy?**

The optic nerve carries information from the eye to the brain and is nourished by blood vessels around it. If these blood vessels become very narrow or blocked for any reason, the nerve cannot function properly and the sight in the eye may be very poor. “Ischaemic” means short of blood. "Optic neuropathy "means a disease of the optic nerve. “Acute “ means something that happens suddenly over hours or a few days.

**What causes AION?**

No one knows for sure, but pressure on the blood vessels due to lack of room in a small optic nerve, may be one factor. Poor blood supply to the nerve at night due to low blood pressure, or use of some drugs such as “Viagra”, or lack of oxygen due to abnormal breathing at night (snoring and sleep apnoea) may be part of the problem. AION mostly occurs in older people.

**What treatment is available?**

Unfortunately, there is no treatment, which will restore normal vision. You may be advised to have a short course of steroid tablets to reduce swelling in the nerve to prevent further damage. However it is important that any risk factors are treated to prevent AION in the other eye and other types of blood vessel disorders. The Casualty officer will order some routine blood tests to check your general health; you should get these done as soon as possible.

**What can be done to prevent AION in my other eye?**

- Stop smoking – this is very important
- Take Aspirin tablets, unless you have stomach problems
- High blood pressure and high cholesterol should be treated, but ask your doctor for advice to help you avoid low blood pressure at night
- Avoid alcohol in the evenings and sleeping on your back, if you tend to snore
- If your attack of AION started soon after starting a new drug, ask the eye doctor if you should avoid taking it in future.

**How soon can I drive after having AION?**

If you have lost a lot of vision in one eye it may take several months to adapt to the loss of sight and you should not drive while you are still adapting. Once you feel safe driving you can start to drive your own car again, but usually it is not legal to drive a Heavy Goods Vehicle with only one normally sighted eye.
What happens next?

After your visit to eye casualty, you will be referred to see a consultant in the eye clinic for further advice. The consultant may wish to carry out further tests or refer you to another clinic. You should also see your own GP for review of your blood pressure etc - a letter will be sent to your GP explaining what has happened.

If you have any queries following your treatment, please contact us on the following telephone numbers:

- Eye casualty: 023 8079 6592
- Outpatient appointments: 023 8079 6555

For a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688.