

Family 'pedigree' provides clues to genetic eye disorders in the region

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Dubai, UAE: Family history is the single most important factor in discovering those family members who have carried/are carrying genetic disorders and can help track and map the incidence of related eye diseases across generations, according to a visiting expert from Moorfields Eye Hospital. Speaking at a recent professional teaching session in Dubai for ophthalmologists, Dr Andrew Webster, Consultant ophthalmologist at Moorfields eye Hospital London, also stressed the important role the Middle East region can play in research into genetic disorders because of the unique gene pool that exists here and the tendency to have large families.

"In one UAE case we studied, multiple family members had vision problems - they could not see in the dark and could not stand bright light, being most comfortable in dim lighting conditions," explained Dr Webster. "The power of the family history allowed us to identify the problem - cone dystrophy."

Dr Andrew Webster, Consultant ophthalmologist at Moorfields eye Hospital London.

A genome scan and genetic sequencing of the family members found a mutation and identified the gene that was causing the problem, which is a significant step forward for all sufferers of this condition."

According to Dr Webster, the family pedigree in genetic work is crucial and has to be investigated in depth, in a process of elimination. The benefits are also very powerful. "Family members of sufferers of genetic eye disease want to know the risks they face and we have the power to tell them. However, this is not always easy for us or for the patient and we work closely with counselors to help manage the process.

"It's an exciting time to be involved in genetic research and the breakthrough earlier this year with a demonstration of effective gene therapy, which showed that the technology and techniques could work, were very exciting. It means that previously untreatable disorders may become treatable. Dubai charity Foresight helped fund this important work. In fact, the UAE and Moorfields Eye Hospital Dubai are actively involved in our research work and are also playing an important role in sharing our collective knowledge with specialists across all our hospitals."

Moorfields Eye Hospital Dubai holds a weekly teaching session for all staff in Dubai and also invites external professionals working in the local sector to join these training events.

"Moorfields is a network of eye hospitals with around 70 consultants focusing on service, research and teaching," said Dr Chris Canning, CEO and Medical Director of Moorfields Eye hospital Dubai. "Continuous education and training is a central part of Moorfields' mission and this applies equally in Dubai. We need to keep all our consultants at the cutting edge of the profession and we take every opportunity to train and share our knowledge and expertise. Our Dubai based consultants come to London regularly to maintain and update their skills."

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