USC University of Southern California

USC Roski Eye Institute
Keck Medicine of USC

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

USC Roski Eye Institute director helps breakthrough glaucoma treatment come to the U.S. as Allergan receives FDA clearance for XEN® gel stent

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LOS ANGELES– Millions of glaucoma patients whose previous surgical treatment failed to reduce their eye pressure have new hope following several years of pivotal clinical trials conducted in refractory glaucoma patients, including work done at the University of Southern California (USC) Roski Eye Institute, as Allergan announces the XEN® Glaucoma Treatment System has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, director of the USC Roski Eye Institute and dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC, who led the work at USC, has called the XEN implantable device "a game changer" especially for those patients where refractory surgery treatments have failed to reduce intraocular pressure (IOP). It also is a breakthrough for patients with primary open angle glaucoma, pseudoexfoliative or pigmentary glaucoma with open angles that are unresponsive to maximum tolerated medical therapy.

In 2015, Varma reported the results of his study participants. One year after the implant, Varma found eye pressure was reduced 44 percent and IOP medications were reduced 65 percent. Allergan has said the XEN stent will be available in the U.S. in early 2017.

"In our quest to prevent blindness and provide treatments that are less invasive and more effective, the XEN implantable device creates a new horizon for glaucoma patients," says Varma. "We were excited to be part of the team where we created a drainage channel with the permanent yet flexible Xen implant and effectively lowered IOP and also reduced the drops needed for many patients."

According to the World Health Organization, glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness worldwide and the American Academy of Ophthalmology reports that more than 3 million Americans have glaucoma but only half of those are diagnosed. Glaucoma can cause blindness when fluid builds up in the front part of the eye putting pressure on the optic nerve. Without releasing that pressure, damage to the optic nerve and potential blindness can occur.

"Glaucoma does not have to lead to blindness," added Varma. "Because there may be no symptoms and the disease progresses slowly, an annual eye exam, especially after the age of 50 that includes a dilated eye exam, will help prevent blindness with early detection and treatment."

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In addition to his clinical trial research with the XEN stent, Varma is recognized as one of the world's leading experts in population-based eye diseases. He has led several National Eye Institute-funded studies including the Prevalence of visual impairment (VI) and blindness doubling by 2050, the largest population-based study of adult Latinos and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) Los Angeles Latino Eye Study (LALES), the largest study of Chinese Americans
and AMD Chinese American Eye Study (CHES) and the African-American Eye Disease Study (AFEDS). The USC Roski Eye Institute is ranked in the Top 2 of the nation's top grant recipients from the NEI and has achieved more than $32 million in annual grant funding.

Click here to watch Dr. Varma talk about his research on the XEN gel stent

About the USC Roski Eye Institute

The USC Roski Eye Institute, part of the Keck Medicine of USC university-based medical enterprise, has been a leader in scientific research and innovative clinical treatments for more than 40 years. Among the top two funded academic-based medical centers by the National Eye Institute (NEI) research grants and ranked in the Top 10 ophthalmology programs in *U.S. News & World Report*'s annual "Best Hospitals" issue for more than 20 years, the USC Roski Eye Institute is headquartered in Los Angeles with clinics in Arcadia, Beverly Hills and Pasadena.

Patients from across the country come to see the USC Roski Eye Institute experts who treat a comprehensive array of eye diseases across the life spectrum from infants to aging seniors. The USC Roski Eye Institute is known for its scientific research and clinical innovation including: creation of the Argus retinal prosthesis implant (also known as the "bionic eye") for retinitis pigmentosa patients; stem cell therapies for those who have age-related macular degeneration; discovery of the gene that is the cause of the most common eye cancer in children; treatment for eye infections for AIDS patients; inventors of the most widely used glaucoma implant in the world; pioneers of a device for long-term intraocular drug delivery; and the first to use telesurgery to train eye doctors in developing countries. For more information visit: USCEye.org.

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