

Blindness from diabetes halves in Wales, new research shows

The research, conducted by the diabetic research unit at Swansea University, analysed new certifications for sight loss, and blindness in Wales due to diabetic eye disease between 2007 and 2015.

The research shows:

- There were 339 fewer new certifications for all levels of sight loss from any cause combined in 2014-15, compared with 2007-08
- There were 22 fewer people with known diabetes with sight loss due specifically to their diabetes. There was a 49% fall in new certifications for severe sight impairment, from 31.3 to 15.8 per 100,000 people
- During this observation period, 52,229 (40%) more people were diagnosed with diabetes in Wales.

Welcoming the research, Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans said:

“Thanks to our national diabetic retinopathy screening programme, we are now successfully intervening at an early stage to prevent people with diabetes from losing their sight.

“The research shows us that earlier diagnosis of diabetic retinopathy and sight-threatening diabetic retinopathy since the introduction of screening has played a significant role, alongside other measures, such as improved diabetes management with timely onward referral and newer treatments.

“I’d like to pay tribute to all those within the NHS in Wales who have worked so hard in making this possible. This is another fine example of the Welsh NHS making a real difference to people’s lives.”

Dr Quentin Sandifer, Executive Director of Public Health Services and Medical Director of Public Health Wales said:

“We are delighted that this study shows there is such clear benefit for our population in Wales living with diabetes to take up their offer of eye screening.

“Diabetic Eye Screening Wales invites patients registered with diabetes who are aged 12 and older for annual eye screening. We would encourage people living with diabetes to take up the offer when they receive their invitation.

“This is a great example of the NHS working together to improve outcomes for our population and is especially impressive as sight loss has reduced even though the number of people diagnosed with diabetes in Wales has increased over this time.”

Prof David Owens from the Diabetes Research Unit Cymru at Swansea University said:

“It is very rewarding indeed to see, after many years of dedicated research to determine the best method of screening for the presence of diabetic eye disease, that the main objective of reducing the number of new certifications for severe sight loss (blindness) by almost half has been achieved.

“Clearly, early detection and improved treatment for sight threatening diabetic retinopathy has been an essential element in this success, reaffirming the need for all persons with diabetes – from the age of 12 years onwards – to have regular screening.”