Diabetes-Related Visual Impairment Down 20%

BY MIRIAM E. TUCKER

MONTREAL — The age-adjusted prevalence of visual impairment among people with diabetes in the United States underwent a relative decline of more than 20% between 1997 and 2008, despite a sharp rise in the number of people diagnosed with the disease during that time.

The findings, calculated from National Health Interview Survey data, were presented in a poster by Dr. Nilka Rios Burrows at the World Diabetes Congress.

The number of adults aged 18 and older with both diabetes and visual impairment increased from 2.6 million in 1997 to 3.6 million in 2008. The prevalence of visual impairment was greater with increasing age, and was higher for women than men, said Dr. Burrows of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta.

The prevalence of visual impairment declined steadily and significantly during the study period. The overall prevalence declined from 26% in 1997 to 22% in 2008, while the age-adjusted prevalence dropped from 24% to 19%, with an average annual relative decline of 2.7%.

The decline in visual impairment may be due in part to a improved detection and treatment of eye problems or better health in the diabetes population overall. However, the increase in the number of new diabetes cases since the 1990s may have led to a large number of people who have not had diabetes long enough to develop visual impairment, Dr. Burrows and her associates noted in the poster.

On a less positive note, only half of those surveyed reported having seen an eye doctor in 2008.

Dr. Burrows declared that she had no conflicts of interest. ■