

BROADCAST- A new vision for diabetic eye exams in primary care offices

OSF Innovation pilots new technology in eight offices with hopes to expand

Like it was for many people, 2021 didn't start out great for 47-year-old Betsy Huffman of Bloomington, Illinois. Her new year began with a long recovery from a December 2020 hospital stay connected with complications from undiagnosed Type 2 diabetes.

Huffman then suffered a mild stroke earlier this year. She had so many doctor's appointments Huffman kept putting off getting an exam from an eye doctor to screen for diabetic retinopathy – the number one cause of blindness in the U.S. That's until a recent trip to her primary care office in Bloomington, where new testing equipment arrived from an Iowa-based company called Digital Diagnostics. So many diabetics skip those eye exams and so OSF Innovation, a division of OSF HealthCare, researched solutions and found the IDx-DR equipment.

Huffman had to just walk down a hall to get tested.

"I just didn't want to face it. I don't know. Being blind is a fear though. That's why I'm glad they did this because like I said it gave me a push because I probably still would not have made that appointment yet." (:17)

The technology takes photos of the back of retina and uses artificial intelligence to evaluate the extent of damage to blood vessels. The exam typically takes a few minutes and in most, but not all cases, doesn't require eyes be dilated.

Unfortunately, Huffman tested positive for diabetic retinopathy. She's scared but glad she was evaluated.

Kimberly Hart, a patient diagnosed with diabetes within in the past 12 months was recently tested by medical office assistant Michael Mansfield.

"This is your diagnostic result – no diabetic retinopathy detected, so no referral needed to an ophthalmologist, so that's great. Next steps, we're gonna re-test in 12 months," he tells her. Hart responds, "Ok." (:09)

Hart says her result comes as a relief.

"That is awesome news. I don't want to have those diseases related to my diabetes so I'm pretty excited about that and I'm glad you get the results right away. You don't have to wait, (she laughs)." (:17)

Among eight locations throughout the OSF Ministry where the new technology is evaluating patients with diabetes, 21% have shown to be at risk for diabetic retinopathy. Becky Buchen, senior vice president for OSF Innovation, says the Performance Improvement team found a great solution for a growing problem of patients not getting checked for retinopathy at an office outside of OSF.

Dr. Mark Meeker, vice president of Community Medicine at OSF HealthCare says the OSF Innovation pilot is showing the value of the exams which takes photos of the retina from the back of the eye, and uses artificial intelligence to instantly assess risk for serious damage that would require a follow-up to an eye specialist.

"The AI can see the early changes of diabetic retinopathy that we may not be able to see with our own eyes. If the AI sees that, it then, the appropriate referrals can be made." (:15)

Dr. Meeker says seeing is believing for some patients who get to see the photos taken during the exam and potential areas of concern the images reveal.

"So the ophthalmologists have tremendous technologies to treat diabetic retinopathy now with lasers and whatnot. But there's nothing as good as prevention. And the way you prevent it is to tightly control the diabetes to begin with. So as soon as we see those retinopathy changes, if we can really get the attention of the patient to really pay attention to their sugar control, we can decrease that progression through prevention, not just through treatment." (:25)

OSF HealthCare should learn later this summer if it receives a grant that would cover costs for two years of training to expand the new, high-tech diabetic eye exams from eight primary care offices to additional sites in communities served by OSF.

**** FOR WEBSITE OR LOCAL REFERENCE**

Currently the IDx-DR exams are available at:

OSF Medical Group, Alton	OSF Medical Group, on Glen Park in Peoria
OSF Medical Group, College Avenue in Bloomington	OSF Medical Group, Illinois Route 91 in Peoria
OSF Medical Group, Galesburg	OSF Medical Group, Streator
OSF Medical Group, Loves Park	OSF Medical Group, Washington