

At the Optometry Unit of the hospital, Mrs. Attakorah began to shed tears uncontrollably when the optician informed her that she had lost her sight permanently. Glaucoma had robbed her of her sight. The doctors tried to console her but no amount of words could soothe her pain. Indeed, that is how fatal and severe glaucoma is. According to the World Health Organization (W.H.O), about 4.5 million people worldwide have lost their sight due to glaucoma. Here in Africa, this same illness is also documented to have blinded one (1) percent of Africa's entire population. To be frank, thinking about the statistics of glaucoma sends shivers down my spine. Sadly, the figures keep on escalating as most people are not even aware of this silent blindness disease. Is this not a valid reason to push the panic button? It is necessary to raise public awareness about this illness. People need to know the symptoms, genetic causes, risk groups, testing methods, effects and potential treatments associated with glaucoma and this is the sole aim of this piece.

First of all, what is even glaucoma and are you at risk? According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, glaucoma refers to a group of disorders that damage the optic nerve, which carries visual signals from the retina to the brain, allowing us to see all the wonders of life. It usually happens when fluid builds up and increases pressure in the eye. Globally, glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness. In glaucoma, the optic nerve is slowly damaged which results in the gradual loss of vision and permanent blindness. The damage occurs at a snail's pace and is easily unnoticed. There are numerous types of glaucoma but the two (2) main types are open-angle (chronic) and angle-closure (acute) glaucomas. For now, glaucoma is surrounded by many mysteries which are yet to be discovered and solved. Everyone is at risk for glaucoma, that is, from babies to senior citizens. However, there are particular groups of people who are at a higher risk. They include the aged, individuals with a family history of glaucoma, people with underlying heart conditions, African-Americans, Asians, diabetic patients and many others.

Aside this, the next on the list is the causes and symptoms of glaucoma. According to an article from Glaucoma Research Foundation, the illness is caused by restrained or blocked drainages in the eyes. Aqueous humour, a fluid inside the eyes usually flows through a mesh-like channel. If the channel gets blocked, or the eyes are producing too much fluid, the liquid builds up. In most cases, experts cannot really pinpoint the cause of this blockage. Glaucoma can be inherited. Some less-common causes of glaucoma include chemical eye injuries, severe eye infections, blocked blood vessels inside the eyes and inflammatory conditions. Though very rare and unintended, eye surgeries meant to correct other conditions can cause glaucoma. Most people with open-angle (chronic) glaucoma do not show any symptoms. Even if they do, they are usually very late. On the contrary, symptoms of angle-closure (acute) glaucoma occur faster and are more obvious. The symptoms include seeing rings around lights, blurred vision, intense eye pain, tenderness around the eyes and many more. If you have any of these symptoms, do not rest until you have sought medical care and advice.

Moreover, the effects of glaucoma should not be underrated at all. One major effect of glaucoma is blindness. Did you know that the eyesight damage caused by glaucoma cannot be reversed? A study conducted at the Akropong School For The Blind by Dr. Michael Agyemang Kwarteng, et al showed that the second leading cause of low vision and blindness amongst the students is glaucoma. Let us not even delve deeper into the impact of blindness on an individual and just leave it as a different topic for another day. Also, glaucoma takes a heavy toll on your finance. Poor patients find it very difficult to cope with medication cost. According to a Ghanaian study titled "Socioeconomic influence of glaucoma on

patients" by Solomon Sarpong Merepa, et al in 2018, over seventy(70) percent of the participants reported some sort of financial burden placed on them by the cost of their medication. Some participants said that the National Health Insurance Scheme(N.H.I.S) does not cover most of their medications so they have to purchase these medicines themselves. Do you not think it would be perfect if changes could be made so as to ensure that the insurance scheme covers all their medications?

The last point on my list is centered on the treatment and prevention of glaucoma. Unfortunately, there is no cure for glaucoma yet. However, there are many fruitful treatment methods that prevent the blindness caused by glaucoma. They include the use of prescribed eyedrops, undergoing eye surgeries and many more. Glaucoma can be prevented if it is detected early. Only an eye examination can detect glaucoma. Most people with glaucoma may have no or very minimal symptoms. It is therefore not surprising that about fifty(50) percent of glaucoma cases are undiagnosed, hammering the need for regular eye examination. I have already gone for mine just weeks ago. The problem is, have you? The popular adage "Prevention is better than cure" really speaks volume. For the sake of your sight, please visit the hospital for an eye check-up. An optician will be able to detect signs of glaucoma and help combat it to prevent further worsening. Disregard the view that only the aged should go for eye examination. Glaucoma can affect anybody at all. Take actions now before it is too late.

To conclude, glaucoma is deadly and is dubbed "The silent thief of sight". Now that you are well educated about the nitty-gritty of glaucoma, please spread the word and help raise awareness of this terrible illness. The Bible says in Matthew 6:22 that "The light of the body is the eyes; if your eyes are good, then your whole body shall be full of light". Therefore, go for an eye check-up and do not let glaucoma block your light.