CATT study raises more questions than it answers

The Macular Degeneration (MD) Foundation has today reviewed the results of the CATT study. This study was designed to compare two drugs Lucentis® (ranibizumab) and Avastin® (bevacizumab) used to treat wet age-related Macular Degeneration (‘Wet AMD’).

The MD Foundation is the peak organisation in Australia representing the Macular Degeneration (MD) community and welcomes and supports all research that can ultimately help patients in the treatment of disease.

The comparison of AMD Treatments Trials (CATT) has just been published online in The New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM).

The Chair of the MD Foundation Medical Committee Dr Paul Beaumont stated today that “the CATT study indicates that ranibizumab (Lucentis) and bevacizumab (Avastin) produce similar visual acuity outcomes for the treatment of wet Age-related Macular Degeneration, however bevacizumab may be less effective in reducing the retinal swelling that occurs with this disease. More research is needed to determine if this will adversely affect longer term outcomes.”

“There are still unanswered questions regarding the safety of bevacizumab. There were more serious systemic adverse events in the bevacizumab group including more hospitalizations over the study period.”

“The numbers of deaths, heart attacks and strokes which followed treatment were low, with similar numbers occurring in each treatment group. Unfortunately, CATT did not have enough patients to determine whether there were any meaningful differences in these serious but rare side effects.”

It is imperative that we never compromise safety and this why the registration and reimbursement of drugs in Australia is evidence-based pertaining to both efficacy and safety.

There are of course, specific circumstances whereby drugs are used off label and this must always be on a case by case basis in discussion between doctor and patient.

The most appropriate treatment for patients with wet AMD currently approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration remains ranibizumab.
Foundation CEO, Julie Heraghty stated “proven safety and efficacy should be the main concerns of any treatment. The MD Foundation’s national medical committee, which comprises leading retinal specialists from around Australia, believes that it is important to put this high profile study into context and encourage frank and open dialogue between patients and doctors about all treatment options and potential risks.”

End.

About the Macular Degeneration Foundation
The Macular Degeneration Foundation is a charity that is committed to reducing the incidence and impact of Macular Degeneration in Australia. The Foundation achieves this through awareness, education, research, support services and representation. Raising awareness of the disease and its potential impacts is one of the key objectives of the Foundation.

About Macular Degeneration
Macular Degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in Australia and affects one in seven Australians over the age of 50. All Australians over age 50 should have an eye test and make sure the macula is checked.

The macula is the central part of the retina, which is the light sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. The retina processes all visual images and is responsible for the ability to drive, see colours clearly, read and recognise faces. Macular Degeneration causes progressive macula damage resulting in central vision loss.

You can have the early signs of Macular Degeneration without even knowing.

Macular Degeneration symptoms may include one or more of the following:

- Difficulty with reading or any other activity with fine vision.
- Distortion where straight lines appear wavy or bent.
- Distinguishing faces becomes a problem.
- Dark patches or empty spaces appear in the centre of your vision.

These symptoms can all indicate that there is something wrong. The major risk factors for Macular Degeneration are age, smoking and a family history of the disease.

To find out more about Macular Degeneration and to receive your free information pack, please phone the Macular Degeneration Foundation on the free call number 1800 111 709 or visit www.mdfoundation.com.au