Dr. Brooke Messer OD, University of Stritch, Chicago, IL, discussed her role as Vice President for Professional Affairs at SynergEyes, the division of CooperVision, that provided insights into the management of keratoconus. She highlighted the importance of early detection, especially in young patients, as keratoconus is a progressive disease that can significantly impact quality of life.

She emphasized the significance of keratoconus education and management, especially in individuals with Down syndrome (DS) and the need for caregivers and primary care providers to screen for keratoconus in this population. The Task Force on Down Syndrome for Keratoconus (Keratoconus in DS: Best Practice Tips for Special Needs Patients) was established in 2022 and is led by Dr. Ann Ostrovsky MD.

Messer explained the role of genetic counseling in the management of keratoconus, where genetic counselors collect detailed family medical histories and assess the risk of certain inherited diseases. This information can help in making informed decisions about treatment options and screening other family members for the condition.

She offered guidance to families seeking answers, stating, "First, I tell them there is not a single gene that causes keratoconus except in a few rare cases. Some genes or genetic variations may influence a decision on treatment choice or motivate other family members to screen for the condition."

Messer also discussed the challenges and uncertainties of keratoconus, noting that it may have environmental influences, but the chicken and egg scenario remains unclear. She mentioned that some people born with keratoconus may not have any environmental influences, while others may develop the disease despite minimal environmental factors.

Quantifying the risk is difficult, and it is still being studied. She noted that there are several academic centers and public companies collecting and analyzing genetic data, indicating that each of us is unique. Some of these differences are beneficial, while others may influence disease outcomes.

Messer shared the following with families seeking answers: "People are born with genetic abnormalities or differences that may or may not influence disease outcomes. It's like the chicken and egg scenario: Which comes first?"

She encouraged families to learn more about keratoconus, such as by visiting the National Society of Genetic Counselors. Genetic counselors play a crucial role in assessing the risk of certain inherited diseases and providing genetic counseling to individuals and families.

Messer also discussed the impact of keratoconus on quality of life (QoL). A group of 39 patients within this study completed the KORQ survey, underwent crosslinking, and then reported outcomes, particularly the visual functioning, symptoms, and emotional status in people with keratoconus.

A more recent study looked at patient-reported quality of life before and after crosslinking. The survey tool demonstrated a significant improvement in QoL scores for patients who underwent crosslinking. Patients with mild, stable disease had responses similar to those with normal vision, while patients with severe disease had a more significant improvement in QoL.


These results should be useful to patients considering crosslinking for progressive keratoconus. In the majority of these patients, 80% (34 of 42 eyes) showed improvement in QoL scores, with 36% (15 of 42 eyes) reporting significant improvements. Mild corneal scarring was detected in 36% of the patients (15 of 42 eyes), but these scars did not affect their vision. No serious complications were reported, and the benefits of improving QoL outweighed the risks.

Messer also discussed the importance of keratoconus education and management, emphasizing the need for healthcare professionals to think beyond a simple vision test and encourage patients to consider keratoconus.

"You don't need to have a steep cornea to have keratoconus," she explained. "It is possible to have keratoconus without it being obvious on a standard vision test. Encouraging patients to think about keratoconus and go beyond a simple vision test is crucial.

She also mentioned that keratoconus can be an asymptomatic disease, where one eye may show no signs of disease while the fellow eye may have irregularities. Messer noted that there are numerous individuals with documented keratoconus whose corneas appear perfectly normal on standard vision tests.

Messer concluded by encouraging patients to seek the care of an eye doctor before March 30 to be recognized by their patients for the care they provide. "You don't need to have a steep cornea to have keratoconus," she stated. "It is possible to have keratoconus without it being obvious on a standard vision test. Encouraging patients to think about keratoconus and go beyond a simple vision test is crucial.

At the conclusion of the event, the NKCF ambassador Tommy Pham reminded the audience of the importance of keratoconus education and management. The event featured a demonstration of keratoconus, a video recording of which will be available on the NKCF website.

Another top award was made to Dr. Clark Chang OD, awarded 'Keratoconus in Children: Reality vs. the True Nature' at the 2023 Contact Lens Symposium in San Diego. Cornea specialists who perform crosslinking and manage keratoconus in children were included in the discussion.

Chiu is a prolific author and in-demand lecturer, as well as a busy clinician. Dr. Chiu was awarded the NKCF President's Award for 'Keratoconus'.

The NKCF was well-represented at the Rising Stars reception that closed the event. A group of 39 patients within this study completed the KORQ survey, underwent crosslinking, and then reported outcomes, particularly the visual functioning, symptoms, and emotional status in people with keratoconus.

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NKCF Stocks Up on an Amazing New Product

Glaukos has been a valued partner to NKCF and is the industry leader in advocating for early diagnosis and treatment of keratoconus. NKCF is grateful to Glaukos for an unrestricted grant to support our education and awareness activities.

NKCF and Glaukos share a vision to improve the lives of people living with keratoconus through early diagnosis and treatment. We encourage readers to see Glaukos' 120-degree, 3D intraocular lens to better understand the potential that patients with keratoconus can experience with this groundbreaking technology.

To learn more about this product and how it can benefit individuals living with keratoconus, please visit the NKCF website, nkcf.org, or contact us at info@nkcf.org.

Update

Dr. Stephanie Pisano OD
Dr. Stephan Kurtin OD
Dr. Michael Greenwood MD
Dr. Brian Chou, OD
Dr. Sam Garg MD
Dr. Garg Family Challenge

NKCF congratulates Dr. Sam Garg MD, Chief Medical Officer of NKCF, on an amazing year in the treatment of keratoconus. Garg Family Challenge.

Support NKCF

Glaukos, the industry leader in advocating for early diagnosis and treatment of keratoconus, recently gave an unrestricted grant to NKCF to support education and awareness activities. To learn more about this product and how it can benefit individuals living with keratoconus, please visit NKCF's website, nkcf.org, or contact us at info@nkcf.org.

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