

Optician launches Mother and Toddler Week to focus on importance of testing pre-school children's eyes

Submitted by: Laderman PR

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With visual impairment affecting up to 10% of pre-school children Jonathan Cohen, clinical director of the award-winning Zacks Kings Cross Eye Clinic in London, is holding a Mother and Toddler Week (20 to 28 November) to heighten awareness of the importance of testing children's eyes from an early age.

"Children's eye tests are currently low down in the priority order for both parents and the medics, yet one in five school age children has problems with their sight that have not been identified," says Cohen.

"Of the 800 children I have tested in the Islington area, approximately 50% have required some form of treatment. The trouble is that they often only present when a teacher or carer thinks there is a problem and by that stage it may be too late for the vision to develop to its full potential.

"Unlike hearing tests, there are no regular checks on children's eye health. Yet if left undetected, visual problems such as refractive errors, occurring during critical periods of development, before the age of 10, may result in permanently impaired vision. If discovered early, easily preventable problems, such as those which could lead to learning difficulties or amblyopia (permanently impaired vision), can be identified and treated.

"Our Mother and Toddler Week also highlights the need to test parents, as some problems, such as squints and high spectacle prescriptions are often hereditary so we can take this into account when testing a child."

As a father of two young pre-school children and a former visiting lecturer at City University's children's clinic, Jonathan has decided to make children a key priority at his clinics and is one of just a handful of practitioners offering this service on the high street; patients can simply phone up and book themselves in without a doctor's referral.

"Most high street opticians cannot and will not see children until they reach school age because they don't have the confidence, or equipment. However this means that children could be suffering," says Cohen.

Basic eye examinations can be carried out from birth to check the eyes appear healthy and to rule out rare tumours. More thorough checks are recommended from 1.5 years (to detect squints). From 3 years it is more easy to conduct a full and thorough examination with subjective responses and shape matching to asses the quality of vision.

Children with dyslexia (and other learning difficulties) are prone to conditions affecting how the eyes work together and focus at close distances. At Zacks Kings Cross Eye Clinic, Cohen carries out a series of specialist investigations in addition to the basic sight test.

"Often spectacles or simple exercises can be used to overcome muscle weaknesses and to stop print

dancing about to make it clear,” explains Cohen. “Coloured overlays and tints can also be used with similar affects in some people. The colour has to be accurately prescribed and is different for everyone, though it is important to rule out all of the ocular complications first.”

Zacks Kings Cross Eye Clinic can supply contact lenses to children who refuse to wear their specs or require specialist lenses to see better. It also provides myopia (short sightedness) control with ortho-K (overnight vision correction), an alternative to laser surgery.

The cost of the toddlers’ tests at the Kings Cross Eye Clinic are covered by free NHS appointments; the test for mums is £35 (unless also entitled to NHS).

The Kings Cross Eye Clinic will have plenty of toys to occupy the toddlers, who will also receive refreshments as will the mums.

Case study: One mother who noticed her four-year-old was having problems with near vision travelled across London to see Jonathan Cohen. The child could not see anything on a test chart and had a vision problem common to one in 20 children. However, with prescription glasses, the child can now see half of the letters on the chart and with continued treatment this will hopefully improve to 20/20 vision. Untreated she would be unlikely to develop good enough vision to drive and would almost certainly have had difficulties at school.

Ends.

Note to Editors – Jonathan Cohen and the family cited in the case study are available for interview

About Kings Cross Eye Clinic (www.kcec.co.uk), part of the Zacks Group, and Jonathan Cohen

KCEC and Zacks are award-winning, state-of-the-art opticians with the latest, hi-tech imaging equipment and optical laboratory, offering specialist services at sensible prices.

In 2006 Jonathan Cohen founded the Kings Cross Eye Clinic and won several awards in his first year. He also founded a digital screening programme for diabetic patients with a large group of doctors in South Camden. In 2007, he merged with Zacks of Fitzrovia.

Zacks has led the profession for the past four decades in the research and development of contact lens products. The business incorporates W Johnson’s Opticians, established 1801, which held a Royal Warrant for the supply of spectacles to Queen Victoria. The company displayed the first bifocal spectacle lenses for general prescribing at the Great Exhibition (1851). Liz Johnson, the last member of the family in optics, still works from the Fitzrovia practice in London.

Jonathan Cohen, BSc(Hons) MCOptom, Optometrist and Contact Lens Practitioner

Jonathan completed his clinical training at London’s Moorfields Eye Hospital and the Institute of Optometry where he developed interests in specialist contact lenses, dyslexia vision therapy and low vision assessment. He went on to work as a visiting lecturer in the children’s clinic at City University,

teach several post-graduate students in private practice and consult on ocular applications for television and film productions.

Maurice N Zack, FCOptom DCLP, Optometrist and Contact Lens Practitioner

Maurice has performed numerous clinical trials to facilitate the research and development of contact lens products, published several clinical papers and lectured widely at both UK and international meetings. He continues to practice at Zacks Fitzrovia.

KCEC - Awards

KCEC won the 2007 Optician Awards for Software Practice of the Year and Dispensing Technology Practice of the Year.

Zacks - Film & TV

Zacks has supplied spectacles for numerous productions including Four Weddings and a Funeral and Gandhi and have worked on numerous TV programmes, including Prime Suspect.

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