

Issued on behalf of Cathedral Eye Clinic, Belfast

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CATHEDRAL EYE CLINIC CARRY OUT FIRST UK ANTI-GLAUCOMA PROCEDURE

A BELFAST woman has become the first person in the UK or Ireland to have revolutionary eye surgery aimed at stopping the march of the blinding illness glaucoma.

Mary McCall, 66, had been slowly losing her eyesight to a disease responsible for causing blindness in more than 67 million people worldwide.

Surgeons at the Cathedral Eye Clinic in Belfast have fitted Mrs McCall's eye with a device already being dubbed the 'millimetre miracle'.

The iStent is a tiny piece of titanium - weighing just 60 microgrammes - and is the smallest medical device ever to be implanted into the human body.

It drains fluid away lowering eye pressure from a sensitive part at the back of the eye which causes the glaucoma illness.

Cathedral Eye Clinic Consultant Mr Colin Willoughby made the announcement today (Monday) during National Glaucoma Week which aims to highlight the destructive nature of the disease and raise awareness about research.

Glaucoma is a progressive and irreversible illness caused when the optic nerve is damaged by a build-up of fluid. Patients begin to lose peripheral vision and can go blind.

At the forefront of research into the illness, the Cathedral Eye Clinic says Mrs McCall will now undergo the 15-minute procedure on a second eye soon.

Mr Willoughby said today:

"This is a massive step forward for the treatment of glaucoma and has the potential to help so many people.

"We have now had time to assess Mrs McCall and we are delighted with the result. More importantly though is that she is delighted and we are planning to schedule treatment of her other eye soon."

Andrew Spence, director at Cathedral Eye Clinic, said today:

"This is a revolutionary step forward for the treatment of glaucoma, an illness which medical science has been battling for years. There is still no known cure.

"The iStent procedure stops the progression of glaucoma and has the potential to save the eyesight of many people."

Mrs McCall, a mother of six from Alliance Avenue in north Belfast, said:

"The stent procedure has changed my life. My eyesight was getting worse and the procedure has stopped that.

"Mr Willoughby was brilliant throughout. I went into hospital in the morning and I was home in time for lunch. Sure you couldn't beat that.

"I used to have to put three different types of eye drops into my eye in the morning and two at night. I'm hoping to have the other eye done soon, so I won't have to use drops at all.

"I would hate to go blind. That is a possibility with glaucoma and now I don't have to worry about that.

"The Cathedral Eye Clinic carried out the procedure for free; and Mr Willoughby also removed a cataract in another operation so that eye is brilliant now. It's like somebody just switched on a light."

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Mr Willoughby is available for interview and to discuss the medical procedure in more detail.

Mrs McCall was referred to Mr Willoughby by her optician when she attended a free eye test appointment during National Glaucoma Week. Mrs McCall is available for interview.

The medical procedure is known as: Trabecular Micro-Bypass Glaucoma Stent Surgery.

The iStent is the first internal micro-bypass implant for the treatment of primary open-angle glaucoma.

The iStent is CE marked and available for use in selected countries in Europe.

The iStent was recently approved for use in Canada.

Mrs McCall is the first person in the UK or Ireland to have the procedure.

The device is made of surgical grade non-ferromagnetic titanium, weighs 60 microgrammes and measures 0.5mm x 0.25mm x 1.0mm.

The cost of the iStent and surgical procedure can cost as little as £1,000 if done in conjunction with other procedures in theatre. eg cataract removal.

The Cathedral Eye Clinic and its partners are involved in a range of research into various eye conditions. It is based at the University of Ulster building in York Street, Belfast.

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