.....

ASIA PACIFIC

SINGAPORE WO

WORLD BUSINESS

SPORT

ENTERTAINMENT

TECHNOLOGY

HEALTH LIF

LIFESTYLE VIDEOS

WEATHER

MORE ▼

Text Resize A+ A A

Print 🚔 Email 🌄

HEALTH

Battling blindness with technology

By Gena Ng POSTED: 01 Apr 2013 14:45

MORE HEALTH NEWS



Does porn affect the brain? Scientists urge more study

1 hour ago

World No Tobacco Day: WHO urged not to snuff out e-cig



Obesity weighs heavily on global health



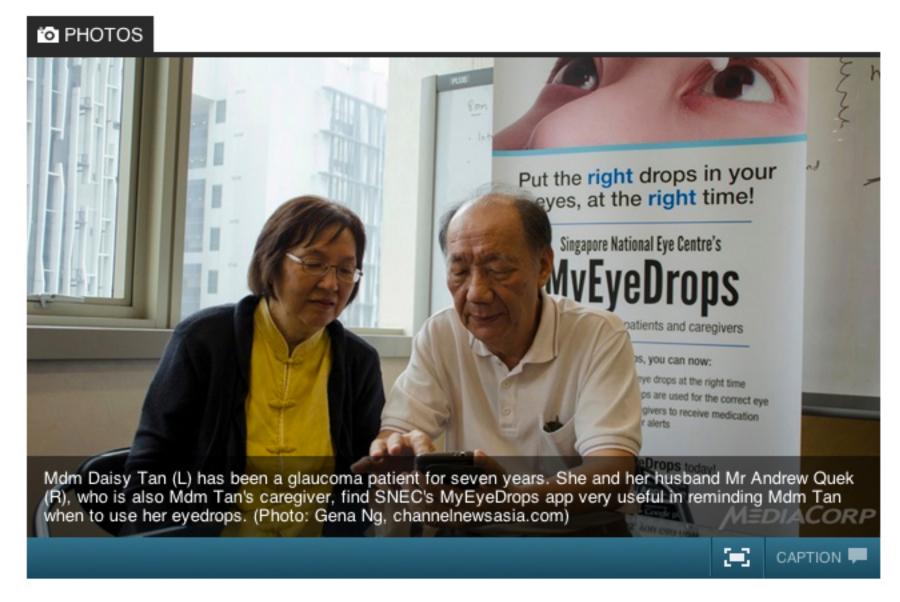
candidate

- Tests show no person-to-person MERS transmission in US
- Financial crisis spurred obesity: OECD
- Syria refugees denied cancer treatment: UNHCR
- Two Filipinos die of MERS virus in Middle East: Manila

Scientists uncover potential vaccine

- Study finds double mastectomy often misused in breast cancer
- Study shows bacteria can linger on planes for a week

It is called the "silent thief of sight", and is a major cause of blindness in Singapore and the second in the world. Glaucoma, which is not curable, often goes unnoticed until a significant loss of vision has occurred.



SINGAPORE: It is called the "silent thief of sight", and is a major cause of blindness in Singapore and the second in the world.

Glaucoma, which is not curable, often goes unnoticed until a significant loss of vision has occurred.

Laser treatment or surgery may be recommended if glaucoma isn't controlled at the first

stage of treatment, which is simple and must be followed faithfully.

The good news is that treatments are available to prevent further damage.

In most cases, patients start with medicated eye drops to help control the disease.

treatment than meets the eye.

To most of us, putting eye drops seems like a fairly simple task, but there is more to this

of eye drops]. Some eye drops are only to one eye, some eye drops are to both eyes," explains Dr Jocelyn Chua, a consultant to the Glaucoma Service at the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC).

"So what happens is that a lot of our patients are on one, two, three, sometimes four [types

than once a day.

66-year-old Daisy Tan has been a glaucoma patient for seven years and for her it is not the

It often becomes more complicated when the different eye drops have to be used more

task of putting the eye-drops, but remembering when to do so, that is the problem.

"I'm not very regular with the timing," said Mdm Tan as a slight shadow of guilt crossed her

"Sometimes at 9am, sometimes at 10am, sometimes at 11am... sometimes I totally forget," she said, adding that she will occasionally apply eye drops twice having lost track of her

The routine can be confusing and is believed to be one of the main reasons why many glaucoma patients tend to forget about their eyesight-saving medication.

Taking a look at the problem from a different perspective, the SNEC came up with solution that tapped on technology.

"With this, once it rings I know have to put it and that's it," said Mdm Tan, gesturing to her

mobile phone where she has installed the application, MyEyeDrops.

With mobile phones now a must-have, the health centre developed the MyEyeDrops

mobile app to help patients track and tackle what would otherwise be a bothersome task.

While MyEyeDrops functions mainly as a reminder that will prompt patients to use their eye drops, the app can do more than just beep, buzz or ring at the right time.

type of eye drop and which eye to put the medication into.

To make it easier for patients to recognise and select the eye drop they're using, the SNEC

also included pictures along with the brand names of all the eye drops available in their

The app allows users to personalise the reminder by selecting specific details such as the

The app also helps patients deal better with their condition, knowing that they are not fighting the battle alone.

who has the app installed on his phone as well.

"Wherever you are in the world, you can still get in touch. You just call up, and [say] 'Hey

"This app, to me, is very useful," said Mdm Tan's husband and caregiver, Andrew Quek,

Patients can also keep a medical diary through the app, another feature which Mdm Tan finds very useful as she likes keeping a record of her condition after every checkup.

Dr Chua admits that since glaucoma is most common amongst those aged 50 and older,

But not everyone is like Mdm Tan.

have you taken your medicine?' That's all."

who are already more tech savvy," said the consultant.

face.

usage for the day.

pharmacy.

some may need some help with learning how to use the app.

"When we created [the app] we sort of wanted it for the younger generation in the future

"For that group of older generation who aren't so tech savvy, they probably have to depend on their children to help them out," she acknowledged.

Dr Chua also agreed that there are limitations to the usefulness of the app, given that some glaucoma patients may have difficulty using the app due to loss of vision.

"It's true, about 30 per cent to 40 per cent of glaucoma patients are blind in at least one eye. That's unfortunate. If they are unable to see very well, then obviously they would have to get some help from their family members," concluded Dr Chua.

Still, there is no doubt in the eyes of glaucoma sufferers and their care-givers that the MyEyeDrops app is anything but useful.

"When you're blind at a very old age, can you imagine how difficult it is?" said Mr Quek, emphasising that glaucoma patients face challenges in performing many daily tasks, even those taken for granted, such as a visit to the toilet.

Stressing the importance of family support and assistance, the care-giver to his glaucoma

sufferer wife pointed out: "When the patients go blind, the mobility is not there."

"So as a caregiver, my suggestion is please help your parents, your grandparents, and you

can reach them wherever you are."

- CNA/gn