

## Valley Community Healthcare Promotes Vision Care and Wellness

Poor eyesight is a major factor that prevents many individuals from managing their professional tasks and personal responsibilities, whether they are reading traffic signs, printed or electronic materials, identifying objects at distance, or coping with schoolwork. Valley Community Healthcare (formerly Valley Community Clinic) was the first nonprofit healthcare facility to offer high quality, low cost vision care to the residents of the San Fernando Valley, and for over forty years has made optometry an integral part of its multidisciplinary patient wellness program. And March is the month when the National Health Organization highlights the importance of eye wellness and vision preservation.

The Optometry Department began in 1980 when nurses in the local schools were identifying an urgent need to provide low cost eye exams and eyeglasses to their students, and contacted the Clinic. For many years, Valley Community Healthcare was the only vision care provider for low-income children and their families. Elham Zarabian, OD, Optometry Department Director for the past 13 years, noted that the stigma of wearing eyeglasses has diminished, and that many frames are designed for appearance and not protection. "For this reason," she commented, "we consult with patients about their lifestyle and make sure that the lenses and frames prescribed meet the safety and impact resistance standards of their industrial workplace or sports activity."

Although Valley Community Healthcare is committed to offering patients a full array of quality, low cost vision services such as comprehensive eye exams, prescription contact lenses and eyeglasses, its full-service vision care program offers so much more. Zarabian and her staff work with the patient's primary care doctors at Valley Community Healthcare departments to promote overall wellness of the whole individual, augmenting the care provided to diabetics, HIV positive patients, and others whose vision is profoundly impacted by their health conditions. In addition, the Optometry Department offers a full evaluation and treatment of eye diseases surgery consultation, and cost-effective referrals to other specialists in cases of eye emergencies such as retinal tear.

Last year, over 5,000 patients received vision care at the North Hollywood Center, with an additional 800 people returning for follow-up treatment. "We provide service to all patients, regardless of their financial status," explains Dr. Zarabian. "The clinic accepts a variety of vision insurance plans, including Medicare and MediCal, and assists the uninsured receive superb care at little cost. One can get a comprehensive eye exam, basic lenses, and glasses frames for about \$100."

Valley Community Healthcare is a nonprofit neighborhood network of comprehensive health centers, dedicated to enhancing the well-being of the community by providing high quality, culturally sensitive medical care to those in need, regardless of their ability to pay. Since its establishment in 1970, the organization continues to expand its medical services and community outreach programs, from its valuable HIV/AIDS resource and service center, to its nationally recognized Teen Pregnancy Prevention Project now an integral part of the Valley Teen Clinic program.