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Newsletter from the Macular Degeneration Foundation, Inc.  
P.O. Box 531313 Henderson, NV 89053  
<http://www.eyesight.org>

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LUCENTIS, A NEW DRUG FOR THE WET FORM OF MD, IS FDA APPROVED!  
by Jessica Pasley

Vanderbilt University Medical Center recently began offering a new treatment for wet macular degeneration that may improve, and in some cases, restore patients' vision.

Lucentis, also known by the generic name ranibizumab, was approved by the FDA last month. The drug is administered by injection directly into the eyeball of patients suffering from wet MD, a chronic condition caused by abnormal growth of blood vessels behind the eye. The disorder leads to leaking and/or bleeding within the eye, causing central vision loss and often blindness.

Nearly 6 million Americans 55 and older suffer from MD, with 1.5 million suffering from some vision loss. It is estimated that 100,000 people develop wet MD each year.

This is the first drug to show promise of significantly improving visual acuity for these patients, said Paul Sternberg, M.D., director of the Vanderbilt Eye Institute. While other treatments slowed the progression of the disease, Lucentis helped improve vision by inhibiting the growth of blood vessels. "This represents a tremendous step forward for patients with wet MD," said Sternberg. "In the past we have told them that there is nothing we can do. Now, we are hopeful and excited that we can tell them there are drugs that might be able to help slow down the deterioration."

"We now can offer a drug that has the potential to improve visual function," added Franco Recchia, M.D., who was the first to administer the drug at Vanderbilt. And that's just what Boggs Huff, 81, is hoping for. Huff was diagnosed in 2000 with the beginning stages of MD in both eyes. Last year he underwent cataract and corneal replacement surgery in his left eye, which was showing signs of worsening. "Doing the surgeries worked great," said Huff. "It was amazing, it changed my sight. I could read without a magnifying glass and I could see the signs on the road." But it was short-lived. Three months later he developed wet MD and came to Sternberg in early 2006. "I feel hopeful," Huff said. "I live in hope, but I am prepared to know that if it doesn't help, I tried it all. When you start losing your eyesight, you'll go through any route. You are more aggressive about finding out what is available to help you. It sure gets your attention."

In clinical trials of Lucentis, close to 40 percent of patients experienced three or more lines of vision improvement. Sternberg cautions that the treatments come at a cost. Side effects can include an

intraocular infection called endophthalmitis, retinal detachment and thromboembolic events. Each injection, 0.5 milligrams/cc, costs nearly \$2,000. Many insurance companies have covered the treatment, Sternberg said. Sternberg and his team, which includes Anita Agarwal, M.D., have treated about 10 patients thus far. All have tolerated the treatments without complication, Sternberg said. Each patient will return for at least three more doses for a total of four treatments, at which time they will be evaluated for visual acuity.

On June 30, 2006 Genentech announced the FDA approval of Lucentis. For information related to this new treatment you may go to [www.lucetis.com](http://www.lucetis.com) or call 1-866-724-9394

Genentech is committed to ensuring that patients have access to all of their drugs for approved indications. Their LUCENTIS Commitment continues Genentech's long-standing tradition of recognizing the needs of the uninsured, or those rendered uninsured due to payor denial, by providing products to those who cannot afford to pay.

Genentech also supports independent public charities that may be able to provide financial assistance for patients with high co-pay plans. Although the independent public charities make the ultimate decision regarding assistance, Genentech specialists are available to assist patients in locating independent public charities that may be able to provide financial assistance with their co-payments.

For all questions related to access to LUCENTIS, please call the LUCENTIS Commitment hotline at 1-866-724-9394.

Retinal Specialist Finder: To find a retinal specialist near you, visit their Retinal Specialist Finder by going to [http://www.asrs.org/for\\_patients/find\\_a\\_retina\\_specialist.php](http://www.asrs.org/for_patients/find_a_retina_specialist.php)

Questions regarding insurance and coverage can be directed to 1-800-Lucetis (1-800- 582-3684).

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Listeners Of Audio Books Connect  
Groups offer opportunities for visually impaired to share  
By Lisa Freed , Special Correspondent

For Aaron J. Beckwith, reading a book is music to his ears. The 81-year-old Hunters Run resident suffers from macular degeneration, which causes deterioration of the central area of the retina. Once an avid reader, Beckwith relies on audio books. Thanks to JBI International, a 72-year-old organization based in New York, Beckwith and others who are blind or have limited vision have free access to more than 1,000 audio books. Once he listens to the book, Beckwith meets with 20 other people once a month in their clubhouse in Boynton Beach (Florida) to discuss it. He is co-chairman of the group, and he said he enjoys listening to novels the most. "I love it," Beckwith said. "I'm legally blind and can't read anymore. It's a wonderful venue for me. I've gotten some great books,

and it's like an assignment." To receive audio books, people have to qualify and provide a certificate stating they are visually impaired, Anton said. Health-care professionals, caregivers and library employees can provide one, and Anton said she directs people to their correct person. Along with the books, a special, four-track audio player is sent to the listeners for free. After they finish a book, they send it back to the appropriate library, postage free. Catalogs are sent in large print, can be found on the Internet, or people can call the librarian to request a book. For more information on JBI International or to volunteer, call Linda Anton at 561-740-9000.

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#### CONTACTING MDF

To speak to a support representative directly, you may call 1-888-633-3937. If you reach our voice mail, please speak slowly and distinctly.

#### ORDERING BOOKS & TAPES

When purchasing items from Amazon.com, please remember to use the MDF search box located at <http://www.eyesight.org/Books/books.html> . By simply originating your search from our website, Amazon rewards the Foundation with a small commission from each product you order. Thank you.

#### MAKING CONTRIBUTIONS:

Please make checks payable to Macular Degeneration Foundation, Inc., P.O. Box 531313, Henderson, Nevada 89053, or you may use your credit card on our web site <http://www.eyesight.org/Donations/donations.html> . Your contributions make our services available as a support system for macular degeneration patients in the following ways:

1. We provide toll-free lines for personal contact assistance.
2. We mail brochures and other printed materials upon request.
3. We support an award-winning web site that provides the latest up-to-date information.
4. We fund research proposal grants to provide therapies for both the wet and dry form of AMD. Contributions marked "research" are used 100% for research.

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MDF was founded in 1992 by Edmund J. Aleksandrovich Ph.D (a victim of macular degeneration). It provides MD patients and their families with the information necessary to understand the disease, the latest news concerning ways to cope with the disease, and supports the efforts of researchers to find a cure.

Subscribers who wish to cancel their subscription or change their email address may visit: <http://www.eyesight.org/Newsletter/newsletter.html> .

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