

4. History of glaucoma

In the Hippocratic Aphorisms (approximately 2600 years ago) the term glaucoma was used to describe blindness coming on in advancing years associated with a glazed appearance of the pupil. The word has usually been interpreted as implying a greenish or bluish hue, but it is more probable that to the Greeks it indicated no specific colour but the dull sheen or “glaze” of blindness.



Hippocrates, a Greek physician

The first recognition of a disease associated with a rise in intraocular pressure and thus corresponding to what is now known as glaucoma occurs in the Arabian writings, “Book of Hippocratic treatment”, of At-Tabari (10th century). In European writings, it is Dr Richard Bannister (1622), an English oculist and author of the first book of ophthalmology in English, who makes the first original and clear recognition of a disease with a tetrad (four) of features: eye tension, long duration of the disease, the absence of perception of light and the presence of a fixed pupil.

Finally in the beginning of the 19th century that the first excellent description of glaucoma with raised ocular tension is given by the French Dr Antoine-Pierre Demours (1818). In London, Dr G.J. Guthrie (1823) recognized hardness of the eye as characteristic of a disease, which he called GLAUCOMA. Finally, Dr William McKenzie, Scottish clinician (1835) ascribed the raised tension in both chronic and acute glaucoma. The final clinical observation in this epoch was the unifying concept of Dr Donders (1862) where he described an incapacitating increased eye tension occurring without any inflammatory symptoms as Simple Glaucoma.



Frans Cornelis Donders

The concept of glaucoma has been further refined, particularly over the last 100 years. Dr Drance (1973) provided for the first time the definition of glaucoma as a disease of the optic nerve (an optic neuropathy) caused by numerous factors, called risk factors. Currently, glaucoma refers to a group of eye conditions, which cause characteristic damage to the optic nerve, the “cable” that transmits the visual message from the eye to the brain, and characteristic damage to the visual field. This damage is progressive, leads to loss of vision if untreated and often is caused by “higher pressure inside the eye” than the optic nerve can tolerate.

In ancient Indian literature the description of the term “glaucoma” is not found.