

Macular degeneration may cause visual hallucinations, warn experts

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Patients who have macular degeneration have been warned that they may develop visual hallucinations.

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists and the Macular Disease Society have called for all eye doctors to warn patients with macular degeneration that they may experience Charles Bonnet Syndrome, which is caused when the brain replaces real images with stored ones.

According to the RCO, research suggests the syndrome occurs in 10-20% of macular patients.

Chair of the RCO's scientific committee, Mr Winfried Amoaku, said: 'The hallucinations often involve seeing people's faces, landscapes, people or objects which aren't there, as well as patterns, grids and brickwork. These can be very frightening.

'In our experience forewarning and knowledge of the possibility of hallucinations helps patients cope when they occur and allows them to realise that this indicates there is only a functional problem with their sight, not a problem with their mind.'

A special event held today at the Royal College of Ophthalmologists in London sought to raise awareness of the syndrome.

The Macular Disease Society runs a telephone helpline giving advice on Charles Bonnet Syndrome and other issues, open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday for macular patients and their families.