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Eye Sees what the Mind Knows: Early Detection of White Eye Reflex in Children

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Retinoblastoma (RB) is the most common intraocular malignancy in children. It accounts for 4% of all paediatric malignancies. It is an aggressive eye cancer in which survival and vision salvage depends on the severity of the disease at presentation. Although it is curable when diagnosed early and treated appropriately, the prognosis is dismal when the key elements in diagnosis and treatment are lacking. Retinoblastoma can occur in one or both eyes. Children diagnosed with this disease often have a white glow in their pupils which shows up when photographed with a flash. The new technology in smart phones has facilitated the early detection and screening of white eye reflex in children even by family members. Flash photography can enable early detection of leucocoria (white reflex). While ocular salvage is the main concern in Western countries, death from retinoblastoma is still common in developing countries. 90% of children with eye cancer live in developing countries and are diagnosed too late to save their lives. Awareness about ocular cancer is low compared to other cancers. Early diagnosis of retinoblastoma is possible through educating the community and training health care professionals. This can help in early identification and management for better outcomes. In India, the situation is challenging as children in rural, urban slums are not routinely screened for any eye disease. Improving early detection and diagnosis, good referrals, counseling, appropriate treatment including prosthetics are needed to save lives. Early detection will increase referrals of children and will improve ocular health in children, and this will enhance Vision salvage, Eye salvation and Life salvage. Defeating childhood cancer begins with community awareness, understanding and action.