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SEE International and Santa Barbara County Public Health Department Launch Local Eye Care Collaboration

**New countywide public/private partnership to provide health and vision services and
collaboration with Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics**

Santa Barbara, CA, July 26, 2011—In a press conference earlier today, Surgical Eye Expeditions (SEE) International announced the launch of an innovative health program through a public/private partnership with the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department and a collaboration with Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics. The SEE International Santa Barbara Vision Care Program Diabetes Examination Program will provide free examinations to patients in Santa Barbara County for the purpose of early intervention and prevention of blindness due to diabetes.

Janet Wolf, Santa Barbara County Supervisor, Dr. Takashi Michael Wada, Director of the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, Cynder Sinclair, CEO of Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics, Dr. Douglas Jacobson MD and Tim Durnin, Chief Operating Officer of SEE International talked about the program and its local impact.

“We hope this partnership will inspire other collaborations and the support needed to treat and prevent diabetes. We are also aiming to educate the entire community so that everyone, from our youngest children to our eldest residents can continue to be productive members of our community,” said Dr. Takashi Michael Wada, Director, Santa Barbara County Public Health Department. “Thank you to SEE International and our dedicated County staff for making this program possible.”

“Specialized medical areas such as vision and dental care are often the most overlooked and challenging to find support for – yet are undeniably critical to the health of our patients and their ability to provide for themselves,” said Cynder Sinclair, CEO, Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics. “We look forward to doing all we can to support the new partnership through our relationship.”

“We are excited to be blazing the trail for this innovative partnership,” said Tim Durnin, Chief Operating Officer, SEE International. “It has been an education and a pleasure working with the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department to craft the plan, and we look forward to working closely together to make the program a resounding success for the health of our community.”

The SEE International Santa Barbara Vision Care Partnership with the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department will provide access to SEE’s local patients to the ophthalmology services at the Santa Barbara County Health Center. SEE is funding ophthalmology services through the Public Health Department for SEE patients for 12 months, through June 30, 2012, up to \$18,720. This

will provide an additional four hours of service per week, through Dr. Douglas Jacobson who currently provides services through the Santa Barbara Health Care Center.

County patients will also benefit from the Partnership with increased access through the expanded hours of the ophthalmology services at the Health Care Center. Eligible County patients will have access to free eyeglasses through SEE International.

Additionally, SEE is donating a Fundus camera, the equipment used for examinations of local diabetic patients, with a value of approx. \$24,000, to the County Public Health Department.

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department has identified diabetes as a significant contributor to morbidity and early mortality for many patients in Santa Barbara County. In early 2011, the Department began a diabetes project with patients who have diagnosed indications of difficulty in managing their disease, to improve their health outcomes.

SEE has also formed a collaboration with Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics (SBNC). SEE will raise funds to donate a second Fundus camera to SBNC for use with their diabetic patients, to increase the organization's diabetes and vision treatment and management efforts.

Diabetic retinopathy is one of the most common eye diseases that may result as a complication of diabetes. Diabetic retinopathy is often detectable through baseline and early screening with appropriate technology and expertise. People with diabetes are also at higher risk for developing cataracts at an earlier age and at higher risk for glaucoma than non-diabetic adults. Without treatment, all diabetic eye diseases can cause severe vision loss or even blindness.

Established in the late 1980s, SEE International's Santa Barbara Vision Care Program provides vision care to community members who cannot afford it. The program provides comprehensive vision and glaucoma screenings, eyeglasses – courtesy of the Santa Barbara Eyeglass Factory – medications, eye surgery and now, diabetic retinopathy screening, at no cost to the patient. Patient referrals come from collaborative partnerships with many local organizations including; social service agencies, schools, churches and county clinics.

About SEE International

Surgical Eye Expeditions (SEE) International is a nonprofit, humanitarian organization that provides medical, surgical, and educational services by volunteer ophthalmic surgeons with the primary objective of restoring sight to disadvantaged blind individuals worldwide. www.seeintl.org

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