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Keep an eye on this eye disease

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SUFFERERS of a variety of serious eye diseases have come together to help one another and press for greater public awareness of an eye condition that could soon become a major public health issue here.

The new organisation, called the Macular Degeneration Society (MDS), will be launched on June 9.

Macular degeneration (MD) is a medical condition in which the macula, the centre of the eye's inner lining, is damaged. This results in the loss of central vision, preventing sufferers from reading, or even recognising faces.

Due to a rapidly ageing population and rising number of people with severe myopia among Singaporeans, MD could soon become far more common.

The first priority of the MDS will be to spread the word about this little known but devastating condition.

According to the society's adviser, Associate Professor Au Eong Kah Guan, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is currently the most common cause of blindness in developed countries.

It is not known how many people in Singapore currently have AMD. But a community study 10 years ago showed that one out of four persons aged 60 and above suffered from the condition.

MD can affect people of all ages, especially those with high myopia – a result of an excessively long eyeball. "What is most worrying is that Singapore is fast becoming the world's myopia capital," Prof Au said.

Mr Sam Fong, the first president of MDS, said: "The group will also give social and emotional support to sufferers as well as make rehabilitation and low vision aids easily accessible to them.

"We hope we can raise funds to help needy AMD patients and perhaps ask the Government for dollar-for-dollar matching," he said.

But as a start, a forum entitled Don't Lose Sight Of Macular Degeneration will be held at the launch of the society.