

Ophthalmologist says "complimentary chromatopsia" nothing to worry about VDT visual side effects "normal"

by James Young
Canadian University Press
VANCOUVER (CUP) — If your world looks rosier these days, you may be experiencing "complimentary chromatopsia," a side effect of your video display terminal.

And although the B.C. Workers' Compensation Board has recently classified the condition as an eye injury, an occupational ophthalmologist says it is really nothing to worry about.

This summer the WCB ruled that Margaret Lewis, a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, suffered an eye injury from prolonged use of a video display terminal.

Lewis, a secretary for the Delta school board, began to see white objects with a pinkish tinge after using a green-screened monitor.

While the WCB refused Lewis' original claim, the review board said the effect fell within the official definition of injury, which includes "any physiological change".

CUPE representative Doris Han-

son said she was delighted with the ruling since there will now be a record of the problem on file for any future claims.

"We don't know what the effects of long term use of VDT's will be," said Hanson.

"There could be slow deterioration of the eyes, but we don't know — unless there is a history somewhere, how can we prove it was the VDT that did it?" she said.

But Ben Wilkinson, an occupational ophthalmologist in Nanaimo and vice-president of occupational health for the B.C. Medical Association, dismissed the effect as trivial and temporary.

"It is like looking at a bright light for a long time and then complaining of spots before the eyes," he said. "There are a lot of subtle physical changes that are normal when people are more anxious about an activity."

An article in the American Journal of Ophthalmology estimates approximately ten per cent of the population may experience this effect due to saturation of the eye's

green photo receptors. And a letter to the New England Journal of Medicine states it may last several weeks.

While agreeing that terminal users should report any eye complaints, he disagrees with the union recommendations that employees have eye examinations before starting work on computers and on a yearly basis thereafter.

"Personally, I think this is financially wasteful for whoever ends up

paying for the examination," he said. "These eye examinations done when there is no complaint are inappropriate."

Wilkinson said extensive research has found no evidence of any harmful radio-active emanations from the monitors' screens.

One side effect he has encountered, however, is a temporary short-sightedness caused by a cramping eye muscle after being focused at a fixed distance for some

time.

Wilkinson said the real problems with computers are ergonomic, or those of adjusting the equipment to users in the workplace.

"The first lesson with computers should be how to adjust the chair," he said, who gave this advice to the instructors at Nanaimo's College.

Unfortunately, the chairs were not adjustable.

Researcher hopeful on third try

AIDS funding nixed

by Emma Sadgrove

A researcher at the University of Alberta is hoping to receive funding for an AIDS research project.

Dr. Colin Soskolne has been turned down for funding for two previous projects. Both were "looking at the potential impact of education on limiting the spread of the infection that can cause AIDS." The first of these projects was to study the effects education could have in Alberta. The second project was confined to the Edmonton area.

Soskolne said, "Education is the most important factor from a primary prevention point of view."

Since AIDS is a sexually transmitted virus, Soskolne feels that education toward "changed behavior, specifically safer sexual behavior" would be effective in limiting the spread of AIDS.

Soskolne is disappointed that his project did not receive funding — he feels that research of this type is extremely important.

"It is regrettable that funding... has not been given priority at this early stage when education could make a great potential impact on the whole AIDS problem in Alberta," he said.

Lois Hammond of Alberta Heritage Medical Funding said that

researchers are usually "recruited cooperatively with the university because the people we fund work in the university system."

Hammond said that decisions about projects are made by several people who are not in contact with each other and are not just in Alberta.

"Applicants have to pass certain standards of excellence," said Hammond. In particular, they are judged on practicality of the project.

Soskolne says that his is "the only proposal that is workable and scientifically defensible."

He intends to pursue funding.

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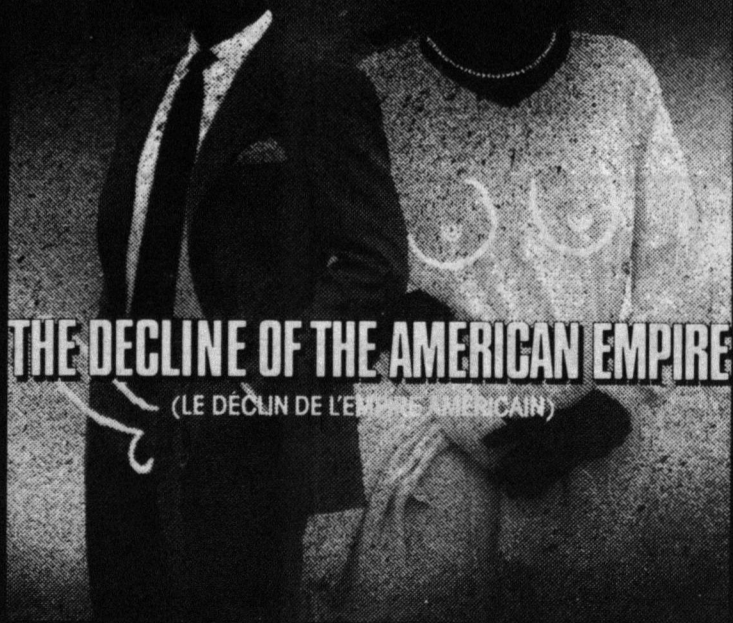
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Phone: 432-5319

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