WESTBURY, NY (December 13, 2013) – Ophthalmic Consultants of Long Island (OCLI) is the first ophthalmology practice on Long Island currently performing a revolutionary test on patients with dry eye symptoms. “The natural reaction to red, itchy, or watery eyes is to assume the symptoms are related to allergies,” said Eric Donnenfeld, MD, OCLI. “However, a patient’s dry eye symptoms may be rooted in a more serious, progressive autoimmune disease called Sjögren’s Syndrome. This makes eye care professionals the first line of defense by identifying Sjögren’s Syndrome at its earliest stage.”

While Sjögren’s Syndrome may present first as dry eye, some other symptoms that are characteristic of the disease include dry mouth, dry skin, fatigue, cough, musculoskeletal pain, and gastrointestinal complications. OCLI doctors can now perform a simple in-office blood test for Sjögrens Syndrome called Sjö™, an advanced diagnostic lab test recently launched in the US by Nicox, Inc. Sjö is a highly sensitive and specific test making it much more accurate at detecting Sjögrens Syndrome, even in the early stages of the disease. The test is sent out to a lab and the results are returned within a few, short business days allowing the doctor to quickly determine early detection of Sjögren’s Syndrome, and appropriate next steps.

Sharon DeCanio of East Meadow was the first person on Long Island to be tested for Sjögren’s Syndrome using the Sjö test. “I’ve have had dry eye for a while and saw the brochure for this test. I realized it was like connecting the dots as I was having other symptoms that were mentioned in the brochure. I knew I had to get tested,” said Sharon. “The test showed I did have the early stages of Sjögren’s. Now I can
follow up with my doctor and discuss treatment options.” Sharon had the test done in her ophthalmologist’s office by Henry Perry MD at OCLI. “As many as 1 in 10 dry eye patients may have Sjögren’s Syndrome,” said Dr. Perry. “Because the early symptoms of Sjögren’s Syndrome are commonly presented as routine dry eye, this revolutionary blood test, done with a simple, in office finger prick, will tell us if the patient has Sjögren’s Syndrome. We then recommend the patient see a rheumatologist who can conduct a physical exam and additional testing as needed. Once a final diagnosis is made, the patient will then be advised about next steps and best course of treatment.”

“Detecting Sjögren’s Syndrome early is very important,” says Gerard D’Aversa, MD, OCLI. “A delay in diagnosis can lead to serious complications including lymphoma, lung disease, gland destruction, depression and anxiety. Because patients come to see us first to treat their dry eye, eye care professionals have the unique opportunity to play a crucial role in the ability to identify Sjögren’s Syndrome while the severity of the disease is low. We urge people to tell us about their symptoms, whether it’s dry eye, dry mouth or the other symptoms that occur in association with Sjögren’s. Early detection is key and patient outcomes may be improved with early diagnosis and intervention.”

Sjögren’s Syndrome affects an estimated 4 million people in the US, of which 3 million are currently undiagnosed. It is one of the three most common autoimmune diseases and is a slowly progressive disease where a person’s white blood cells attack moisture-producing glands, thus resulting in dry eye as one of its symptoms. According to the Sjögrens Syndrome Foundation, dry eye is a common early symptom of Sjögren’s Syndrome and because of this, there is an average delay of 4.7 years for patients to receive an accurate diagnosis for Sjögren’s Syndrome.

Sjögren’s Syndrome can occur alone or in association with other autoimmune disorders. Sjögren’s symptoms frequently overlap with or “mimic” those of other diseases including lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue
syndrome, and multiple sclerosis. Because the disease is most common in middle-aged women, dry eye symptoms caused by Sjögren’s Syndrome are often attributed to menopause. Nine in 10 Sjögren’s Syndrome patients are women.

Nicox has established a partnership with the US Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation to raise awareness of the prevalence, seriousness and significance of Sjögren’s Syndrome to eye care specialists. Please visit www.sjogrens.org for more information about the Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation and for more information about the Sjö test from Nicox, please visit www.nicox.com. To schedule an appointment with OCLI, please call 1-866-SEE OCLI (1-866-733-6254) or visit www.ocli.net

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**About OCLI:** OCLI, one of the largest ophthalmology practices in the nation, consists of 26 eye doctors and specialists representing most subspecialties of ophthalmology and optometry in 9 locations throughout Long Island; in Rockville Centre, Lynbrook, Valley Stream, East Setauket, Manhasset, East Meadow, Port Jefferson, Mineola and Garden City. OCLI also has a research department that is involved in FDA studies to improve the treatment and diagnosing of ophthalmic diseases. For more information, please call 1-866-SEE-OCLI (1-866-733-6254) or visit http://www.ocli.net.

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