

Low Vision Viewpoint

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E-Newsletter from
Community Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted



Vision Rehabilitation 2007

Since we first started publishing the Low Vision Viewpoint a decade ago, we have noted some significant changes in those requiring rehabilitation because of blindness or visual impairment. Among these changes are increased longevity, changes in environment, nutrition, and changes in concepts of aging. These changes have converged to produce a very large, new population of visually impaired older adults. This is true not only in Seattle, but across the country as a whole. The increased numbers of older adults and their differing needs, skills and experiences are challenging many of the existing systems.

Research such as "Age-Related Macular Degeneration: Treating the Whole Patient" Archives of Ophthalmology 2004, and "Measuring Low Vision Rehabilitation Outcomes with the NEI VFQ 25" Investigative Ophthalmology and Vision Science 2002 suggest that individuals with low vision participating in multi-disciplinary extended vision rehabilitation training programs, as provided by Community Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted (CSBPS) may have more successful outcomes than those who receive optical device prescriptions without the additional support.

A multi-disciplinary approach to low vision offers extended support to facilitate successful outcomes. Professionals on our vision rehabilitation team include our optometrist, low vision therapists, rehabilitation/occupational therapists, orientation and mobility specialists, social workers, and an assistive technology specialist. Referrals can be made for a patient's specific need or as in many cases for an evaluation to determine the benefit of a variety of optical devices. If you feel that one of these services should be the first priority for your patient, please let us know. We can be reached Monday - Friday from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. at **206.525.5556 or toll free 800.458.4888, or by email at csbps@csbps.com**.

Driving with Impaired Vision

Cessation of driving among older adults with vision loss is frequently associated with decreased quality of life. Among working adults with visual impairments, the inability to drive can negatively impact employment. Consequently, as individuals with low vision seek rehabilitation services, driving may be the primary goal for a small percentage. In Washington State the Washington Administrative Code, WAC 308-104-010 Vision Test, has been amended. The visual acuity limit to qualify for a driving test for a license has been lowered from 20/200 to 20/100. It also appears that there will no longer be a restricted license category. An individual with visual impairments may continue to use a bioptic or telescopic lens as an aid while driving. If you are an eye care provider and have been completing the Report of Vision form for your patients, you may want to look at the changes to the WAC. Currently, CSBPS does not complete the Report of Vision form for patients, however we are happy to refer patients to their eye care provider for this service.

The Digital Future

The demographic profile of patients seen in our low vision clinic has changed little over the past 10 years, and our assessment and prescribing protocols have remained relatively stable during this period. However, there has been a significant change in the profile of devices being prescribed.

Most of these changes are attributable to the introduction of new low vision products into the marketplace in tandem with the changing visual ambitions of the patients. One of the most obvious changes is the increased number of elderly low vision patients who are seeking computer access. The use of video-based technology is another area that has expanded over this period. We have an extensive array of competing CCTV/Video Magnification devices to ensure that interested patients obtain the most suitable device for their needs. Our Assistive Technology Specialist, Lan Nguyen, is also available to provide assessment services and demonstrate computer applications for individuals with a visual impairment.

For more information call Lan Nguyen at 206.525.5556 or toll free 800.458.4888.

Medicare Vision Rehabilitation Demonstration Project

As reported in a previous issue of the Low Vision Viewpoint, Medicare is conducting a demonstration project that will study the benefits of expanding services for patients with moderate to severe visual impairments. The project's implementation phase started in April 2006 and is projected to run for a period of five years. Through this demonstration, Medicare will assess the impact of providing reimbursement for vision rehabilitation services in appropriate settings, including the patient's home, by qualified vision rehabilitation professionals under the general supervision of a physician. Washington State is one of the six selected areas in the country; CSBPS is participating in the project. As we near the end of the first year, we expect to see some initial data. For more information on the Medicare Project, go to www.cms.hhs.gov.

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