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Eyes That Talk

Some time ago, Gaurav came to me with the idea of doing something to recognize the patients you help every day. Though retina specialists are the ones making new discoveries and determining new procedures and treatments, patients are what it's all about. The eyes on the cover of this issue represent the patient—the individual behind the retina.

As part of this project, I recently spoke with a few patients being treated by retina specialists. It was a truly heartwarming experience, as they all related how much they appreciate what their retina specialist is doing for them.

In these conversations, I was repeatedly told how much confidence and trust patients put in their retina specialist—not only in their physician's ability to treat the condition, but also to help them overcome the challenges they face, and to educate them about what limitations may need to be accepted. Of course, the physician helps the patient's eyesight, but he or she plays an important role in their mental status as well.

I think he's a superb physician. I really trust him and I think he has excellent skills. So I put myself in his care.

I have more confidence now. Initially your imagination begins to run wild, but I put everything in the retina specialist's hands, and maybe in the hands of a higher power, and I feel at ease.

One thing very important to patients is to stay informed—not only from the initial diagnosis and explanation of what that means, but also to understand how the treatment is helping and to be told of their progress as time goes on.

The only complaint I have is I wish he would share more information with me. He comes in and says everything is OK and leaves. I would like more information than that.

Initially your reaction is one of anxiety and a lack of information about what your issue is. But each time I went to my retina specialist, after he did the examination in my eye he would show me what was wrong, and he would guarantee that I'd have an appointment within the next 30 days. At that point, it was easier on me and my family because now I felt some calm and comfort. I came to build great respect for that particular center. I couldn't ask for anything more.

Your patients have a tough road, and a lot of everyday things pose a problem for them.

I can't pluck my eyebrows.

I have trouble cutting my beard on the right side.

I have a speedometer in my car that's black, and the needle is red, and if I have dark glasses on, I have no clue what my speed is.

I'd like to see the signs better when I'm driving. And reading the newspaper—I have a problem doing that.

Yet each person I spoke with had a positive attitude and a good perspective on the situation. They need to adapt and make necessary adjustments, such as getting better lighting to be able to read, not driving at night, and understanding that it's no longer a good idea to charge the net during a tennis game. They also spoke of the inconvenience of going for their appointments, needing to have a friend drive them, not having enough parking available at the clinic, and waiting while the doctors struggle to keep appointments on schedule. But they know the bigger picture is much more important, and that these "little" problems are an alternative to blindness, and these patients are truly thankful to their retina specialist for that.

He's kept me from going blind.

It isn't so much he changed my life; he prevented it from being changed.

I really enjoyed speaking with these patients. What I found was a group of people determined to overcome their challenges and make the most of what they have. They know the retina specialist is one of their most important advocates, and they're very appreciative of the treatment, information, and comfort they receive. You have a great responsibility as a retina specialist to provide these elements. Hopefully your rewards are even greater.

Steve

I appreciate Steve's interviewing these patients and bringing us their stories, which we all hear every day. The eyes we see on the cover are eyes filled with fear, apprehension, and grief. Every day, we try to help them overcome their fear, alleviate their apprehension and comfort them in their grief. We are all quite fortunate and privileged to take care of these eyes, and despite all the issues we deal with, it's an honor to do so. Most of us don't need to be reminded, but sometimes it is refreshing to hear the effect we have on the lives of our patients and their families.

Gaurav

We would like to thank David Yates of The Retina Institute, St. Louis, MO, for providing the eye photos, Retina Times designer John Tom for the presentation, and all the individuals who allowed us to use their pictures. ■

Financial Disclosures

Mr. Lenier – None; Dr. Shah – ALCON: Consultant/Advisor; QLT: Consultant/Advisor; DORC: Consultant/Advisor; HEIDELBERG ENGINEERING: Consultant/Advisor.