The Road to Vision Rehabilitation: First Stop - The Eye-Care Practitioner

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Introduction

In 2002, a Quebec survey determined that only 20% of eligible patients received Vision Rehabilitation Services (Grevesse & Baumgartner, 2002). Similar results were obtained in an Australian study (Pollard, Simpson, Lamoureux & Keefe, 2003), where lack of referral was found to be a major problem.

In a recent Canadian study, 13% of seniors stated that services had not been suggested and an additional 28% reported that they did not know how to access Vision Rehabilitation Services (Canadian National Institute for the Blind, 2005).

Present Study

Visually impaired individuals (VA of 20/70 or worse in the better eye with best standard correction) are being recruited in three ophthalmology departments of university-affiliated hospitals in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The study data are based on responses to a structured interview, containing demographic as well as questionnaire components.

Flow-Chart Key:
Didn’t Know = Unaware of Rehab Services / no referral
Knew & Didn’t Go = Aware/ referred, but chose not to utilize Services
Knew & Went = Referred and utilized Services

Results

Ophthalmologists seem to selectively refer visually impaired people for Rehabilitation Services depending on their level of visual acuity, Chi squared = 17.06, p < .005.

The majority of referrals occurred in the two groups with more severe vision loss.

Overall, men and women were referred equally, independent of their acuity status.

Additionally, age does not seem to affect the referral pattern of eye-care professionals.

Conclusions

It is important to note that approximately 10% of patients receiving services in an urban university-affiliated hospital qualify for Vision Rehabilitation Services.

This percentage is most likely an underestimate, as individuals that qualify based on visual field criteria were not included in this sample.

Based on these preliminary data, we can already conclude that the first barrier to accessing Vision Rehabilitation Services is often the lack of awareness and/or referral by Eye-Care Practitioners.

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**Patient Pool in one Department of Ophthalmology**

\[ n = 9071 \]

**Patients Eligible for Vision Rehabilitation Services**

\[ n = 870 \ (9.6\%) \]

**Patients Recruited into the Study**

\[ n = 183 \]

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**Group 1**

20/70 - 20/200

\[ n = 50 \]

- Didn’t Know: n = 21
- Knew & Didn’t Go: n = 9
- Knew & Went: n = 20

**Group 2**

20/200 - 20/400

\[ n = 73 \]

- Didn’t Know: n = 19
- Knew & Didn’t Go: n = 8
- Knew & Went: n = 46

**Group 3**

20/400 - NLP

\[ n = 60 \]

- Didn’t Know: n = 7
- Knew & Didn’t Go: n = 7
- Knew & Went: n = 46

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**F / M**

- 20/21
- 6/3
- 12/8
- 4/15
- 5/3
- 25/21
- 5/2
- 3/4
- 22/24

**Age**

- 43-100
- 53-95
- 62-88
- 46-88
- 57-99
- 54-98
- 57-85
- 38-94
- 35-96