



THE HUMBLING EXPERIENCE OF GLAUCOMA CARE

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My training to become an ophthalmologist has exposed me to diverse facets of eye care such as the adrenaline rush of trauma patients and open globes, the almost automatic spiel to patients with blepharitis, the instant gratification of cataract surgery, and the twist-your-head-around plans for strabismus surgery. One

experience that sticks out to me, however, is facing patients with glaucoma.

These individuals endure long appointments, tiresome testing, and bothersome lights in order to speak to a doctor who may well say that, despite the best efforts, they are still losing vision. It is humbling to realize that basic questions about the pathophysiology of glaucoma remain unanswered, that we cannot predict how the disease will progress, and that management is not a cure.

Nevertheless, I learned that the glaucoma clinic need not be a disheartening place full of patients with low vision. Committing myself to my patients and their care showed me people who want to fight for their vision. These people overcome cumbersome drop regimens, defeat their fear of surgery, and place their trust in me. Because they believe in me, they try their best to adhere to prescribed medical therapy and testing schedules, even if none of it provides them improved visual acuity. Glaucoma clinic brought me to the core of why I decided to study medicine: the idealistic thought of serving people in need and caring for the sick.

After the emotional roller coaster of facing my strengths and limitations, I have decided that I will do my best for my patients. If they entrust me with their sight, I bear the enormous responsibility of offering care that is nothing short of excellent. These individuals need my time and patience to explain their drug regimens repeatedly with the assistance of color-coded labels and large letters. They need me to check their (sometimes extensive) list of medications and verify

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that I am prescribing the best drops for them. They need me to take the time to complete a detailed review of systems. They need me to check that a tremor or advanced arthritis in their hands will not prevent them from instilling their drops. They need me to focus when I explain a change in their vision. My time will be rewarded with a strong doctor-patient alliance that has tremendous healing power.

I am grateful to my mentors, and I invite everyone who teaches residents to instill in them an attitude that gains and honors patients' trust. In words often attributed to C. S. Lewis, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.” ■

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