



A New Dawn

The Low Vision Exam

Vision Rehabilitation consists of various services designed to help blind and visually impaired persons regain their independence and resume living productive lives.

The low vision exam is an essential part of vision rehabilitation. Optometrists certified in low vision conduct comprehensive eye exams “to evaluate not only how well the patient can see an eye chart, but also how well they see faces, street signs, newspaper print and all other visual cues that help guide us throughout our days.” (Lighthouse International Web cite)

At the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, following completion of the functional vision exam, the optometrist may prescribe optical aids such as: magnifiers, telescopes, special sun-wear and lighting devices to help maximize the consumer’s remaining vision. Trained rehabilitation teachers and teaching assistants, under the guidance of the optometrist, dispense these devices and provide the necessary instruction in their proper use to help consumers “adjust to and reap the maximum benefits of such aids and devices.” (Lighthouse International web site.)

On occasion, when consumers return home with their optical devices they may run into some difficulties in their use and may require additional training in their homes.

The low vision exam and the dispensing of optical aids are often two of the first components of the vision rehabilitation process for most individuals. Hence, the proper selection, dispensing of, and training with these low vision aids is very important if the vision rehabilitation experience is to be a “successful” experience.

Feelings of frustration and depression can run high in the early stages of vision loss. Exposure to positive experiences in the beginning phases of rehabilitation can impact greatly on the amount of progress one makes.

Depression can greatly hinder successful adjustment to vision loss. According to Rheinhardt, Horowitz & Sussman-Sculka (2006): “Whether a person with vision loss becomes depressed seems more related to the impact the vision loss has on the person’s functioning rather than the actual severity of vision loss; and that impact can be devastating.”

Concerning low vision devices, the authors state: “We found that people who use a greater number of these devices showed decreases in both their functional disability and depressive symptoms for a six month period. The use of optical devices seems to have had a positive effect

because they enabled people to continue to accomplish tasks, visually.” (Reinhardt, J.P., Horowitz, A. & Sussman-Sculka, C. “Depression, Vision Loss and Vision Rehabilitation” SHARING SOLUTIONS Fall 2006).

In their article on acceptance, Brennan and Sussman-Sculka (2003) wrote: “The importance of accepting vision loss for both psychological and functional well-being is a consistent finding in many of our studies. For example, people who are visually impaired and are able to accept their condition are less likely to be depressed and more likely to use vision rehabilitation services to help them maintain their life-style and daily activities.” They further stated: “Learning about and using assistive devices can help people feel less dependent on others and more in control of their lives” (Brennan, M. & Sussman-Sculka, C. “Acceptance: Coming to Terms with Vision Impairment” SHARING SOLUTIONS, Fall 2003).

Thus, the comprehensive low vision exam, prescription of low vision aids, the dispensing of such aids under the direction of a certified optometrist and the proper education in the use of these optical devices is paramount to the successful processing and integration of vision loss into one’s life experience. Competency in all aspects of vision rehabilitation is essential to success. Success builds on success. Consumers who have been properly dispensed and in-

structed in the use of low vision aids will be successful in their utilization and will be increasingly motivated to learn other adaptive techniques to further enable themselves to reach the goal of independent living.

In summary, consumers who are receiving high quality rehabilitation services will be more likely to be compliant with their personalized rehabilitation program; experience less frustration and depression; and ultimately successfully resume leading personally productive lives.

If you or a loved one are experiencing diminishing vision and would like a low vision evaluation, or perhaps have had a low vision exam in the past, but have lost additional vision and would like to be reassessed, please **contact CABVI at 797-2233 at extension 1239, the Low Vision Clinic, to schedule an eye examination.**

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