

Title: Navigating The Healthcare System to Increase Quality of Life in the Geriatric Population: Case of an 80-year old Male with Blindness

Authors: Endari, K., Flores, J., Aragón, D., Chang, C.

Affiliations: UTRGV SOM

Bilateral retinal artery occlusion (BRAO) is defined as the blockage of blood to the retina in both eyes and can lead to partial or permanent loss of eyesight. This uncommon diagnosis can necessitate lifestyle changes that require supplemental assistance to help with activities of daily living. Navigating the healthcare system in general is formidable. However, doing so as a geriatric patient with limited eyesight and no social support escalates the challenge.

This is the case for an 80-year-old male with history of vision impairment due to BRAO, coronary artery disease, heart failure, atrial fibrillation, chronic kidney disease, basal cell carcinoma of the nose, gout, and tobacco abuse, with no wife or children, who presented to the Internal Medicine outpatient clinic for follow up. He drove to clinic despite his visual impairment and is adamant about being as self-sufficient as possible, stating that he has been in a nursing home previously and that would be the worst outcome for him as he values his freedom at home above all else. The patient is competent and has the capacity to make decisions. His decision to live at home requires finding care that is in line with his wishes and keeps him safe. He is under Medicare but does not qualify for Medicaid according to Adult Protective Services (APS), which has visited his home twice before. However, Medicare is only able to provide Home-Health services for about 10 hours a week, not sufficient for someone with his health status. Shared decision making among the ophthalmologist, APS, and primary physician led to appropriate documentation of 'Blindness' as a diagnosis providing a wider range of services to the patient through disability.

This case highlights how the role of primary care physicians goes beyond its traditional one. This patient is disabled and without any immediate family, meaning that his healthcare team is the only connection he has to appropriate resources to sustain his quality of life. Documenting this patient's blindness provided greater access to social services, which is a prime example of why physicians should know how to guide their patients through the healthcare system.