

Early referral to CNIB can help patients overcome the challenges of vision loss

BY ROBIN SINGER

Losing vision is too often synonymous with losing independence. When people start to lose their vision, they suddenly appreciate how much they rely on their eyesight. Everyday activities that most of us take for granted, like pouring a morning cup of coffee, reading the newspaper or checking email suddenly become monumental challenges.

Whether people are in the early stages of vision loss or already legally blind, CNIB offers a warm, supportive environment and an array of services including functional low vision assessments to help people make the most of their remaining vision and a wide range of other services – including assistance with things like learning safe indoor and outdoor travel, finding new ways to accomplish daily tasks such as cooking and hobbies, peer support, helpful products and technology and the large CNIB Library of accessible books – all of which can help clients regain their independence and lead fuller lives.

But before CNIB can help, patients need to be referred. That's where eye care practitioners come in. They play a vital role in

connecting people with low vision to CNIB. The earlier the referral, the more CNIB can do to make the most of a client's remaining vision.

According to Lee-Anne Cross, Director of Service Quality at CNIB, "Early referral is greatly beneficial to clients, as we can ensure that they receive the support and information they need to successfully cope with their vision loss, and minimize the isolation and distress they may be experiencing."

Dr. George Papadakis is an optometrist who knows first-hand just how much CNIB can help people overcome vision loss. He has referred many of his own patients to CNIB and sees it as a valuable resource.

"People want to do their cross-words, sign a cheque, travel the subway, read a newspaper... things that make them more independent," he says. "When a patient comes in and we determine they're visually impaired, we'll see if we can help them in the office with visual aids. But we can't do it all. A lot of times I'll refer them to CNIB for things that are out of my area of expertise.

What CNIB offers

CNIB works closely with the eye care community to ensure Canadians get the support they need to live well with vision loss and continue to enjoy everyday activities. The organization offers a wide range of services that can help people who are experiencing vision loss.

You don't need to wait until a patient is legally blind to refer them to CNIB. Early referral can help patients get the support they need once they begin to experience vision loss. Their warm, welcoming environment and friendly, expert staff will help patients adjust to their low vision and continue to live a full, active life.

The following are just some of the many services available to Canadians through CNIB.

- Training to maximize independence at home and in the community
- Peer-to-peer emotional support
- Adaptive products and technologies that make the most of remaining vision
- Career and employment services
- Computer training
- Child and family services
- Counselling
- Canada's largest library of audio books

For a complete list of all of the support services CNIB offers, please visit www.cnib.ca.

A common misconception about CNIB is that it's just for people who are legally blind. In fact, 9 out of 10 clients who are referred to CNIB have some remaining vision.

"CNIB can take it to the next level... help them with their needs at home or do a high technology assessment where a vision specialist will sit down with them and show them what their options are, what funding is available, how to incorporate new support tools and techniques into their daily lives. And they can provide other assistance as well – whether it's help finding employment or having [a CNIB specialist] come into their home to show them how to prepare meals or pour a cup of coffee without spilling it."

"A lot of the misconception is that people think they need to be legally blind to go to CNIB," says Dr. Papadakis. "But there are people who are considered to have low vision; they can't drive, they can't read properly, and they can be helped by CNIB... It's a shame that this assistance is available and a lot of the time people don't realize help is there."

Dr. Kashif Zoberi, also an optometrist, shares the same high regard for CNIB. His clinic has had a relationship with CNIB since 1998.

"I believe it's an extremely valuable service because it gives patients the ability to utilize their residual vision and to function in their activities of daily living," he says. "If it were not for CNIB, I think a majority of patients who have seen specialists would be left

in limbo. If they didn't have that service they would be devastated by their vision loss."

Dr. Zoberi recalls the story of one patient with vision loss who was referred to CNIB. When she came to the charity for the first time, she was already classified as legally blind. The support services they provided – including mobility services and in-house training – coupled with the best possible magnifiers and optical aids, brought her vision to 20/100 – still visually impaired but not legally blind – and enabled her to regain her independence.

"That rehabilitative intervention brought back all those daily activities," says Dr. Zoberi. "That in itself is an enormous impact that CNIB has every day on patients' lives. And, to be there with their forms in every optometrist's and ophthalmologist's office – that's huge."

Like Dr. Zoberi, Dr. Papadakis feels that CNIB offers hope to many Canadians experiencing vision loss.

"A lot of times patients are told there's nothing more that can be done," he says. "It happens all the time, every week. But in most cases, CNIB can help. As it turns out, all they needed was the right support."

The process of referring a patient couldn't be easier or faster. Eye care practitioners can

make a referral by phoning 1-800-563-2642, completing our service request form online at www.cnib.ca or faxing it to 416-480-7700. Or, they can have their patient directly contact their nearest CNIB office.

CNIB will contact a client immediately, put them in touch with a specially trained staff member who determines how to best assist them, and refers them to the appropriate service providers to begin the rehabilitation process. With just one simple referral form, a patient's life can be transformed.

Thanks to CNIB, for people experiencing vision loss, the future looks a lot brighter.



Connecting patients with CNIB

There are many quick and easy ways to connect a patient with CNIB. You can:

- Make a verbal referral by calling us at **1-800-563-2642**
- Download a Request for Service form from www.cnib.ca and fax it to CNIB at **416-480-7700**
- Visit www.cnib.ca and complete our online form
- Have your patient directly contact one of CNIB's 55 local community offices