**Guide Dogs Victoria’s Perceptions Newsletter for Referring Professionals: AUTUMN 2018**

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**All about Acquired Brain Injury**

This issue of Perceptions focuses in on neurological vision loss caused by Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).  Suffering either a stroke or a traumatic brain injury often leads to a vision change, and in as many as 30-40% of people this goes on to significantly affect their life.

Even though vision changes can have a tremendous impact on a person’s quality of life, many people find it very hard to self-identify a vision problem. There may be vague descriptions of blurry or shifting vision, they may have headaches, balance problems or fatigue quickly. All of these could be due to vision changes, and helping a patient with strategies to deal with these is essential to that patient’s long term well-being as they progress through rehabilitation. This issue of Perceptions contains more information on identifying common vision changes in your ABI patients, and contains a case study of John, one of our clients who had his life devastated by stroke, but is now back on the road to recovery.

If you want to learn more about ABI and vision loss we would urge you to join us for a free 2 hour program for Service Providers and Health Professionals ‘*ABI and Low Vision: A workshop for Professionals’*.  Speakers will cover types of neurological vision loss, functional vision assessment and strategies in Orientation & Mobility for the ABI patient. The next session will be held in Kew on the 29thMarch. Booking is essential and we only have a few spots left so get in quick on 1800 804 805 to secure your place.

I hope to see you there!

Warm Regards

Shelley Pannier
Client Services Manager

Remember:

* Refer online, via the ‘Request a Service form’ on [www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au](http://www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au/).
* We always welcome your feedback, comments and contributions. You can contact us on  CSAdmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au.
* You are welcome to forward this email on to your colleagues and members of your networks who can subscribe to our newsletter [here](https://www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au/resources/publications/).

**Dates for your Diary**

**Regional Information Sessions:** Free information sessions with morning or afternoon tea covering the locally available services provided by GDV. Come and meet some local practitioners, have a look at some technology, and see if we can offer you something new to help your patients and clients. No bookings necessary. Further info 1800 804 805.

* Ballarat Bell Tower Inn, 1845 Sturt St. Ballarat 3350, Wednesday 28th March 1.30 – 3.30pm. No booking required.
* Geelong & Bayside Peninsula – Info sessions will be in April (date tbc)

**Acquired Brain Injury and Vision loss – Professional’s Workshop**: run regularly by Guide Dogs Victoria. Further information or to express your interest email CSAdmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au or call 1800 804 805.
2018 Sessions are:

* 29th March at GDV: few places left, be quick!
* 5th July
* 25thOctober

**Bendigo and surrounds Low Vision Orthoptist Assessments:**
21st March all day. Bendigo Community Health Services Central, 165-171 Hargreaves Street, Bendigo.
If you have a patient or client with a diagnosed uncorrectable vision condition then they can book in for this hour long assessment at no cost by calling 1800 804 805.They will receive a functional vision assessment and some strategies for reading/lighting/glare etc, plus access to an ongoing program if they require.
We will be running these assessments all over Victoria throughout the coming year, but you can also arrange a bespoke information session for your staff, or a low vision orthoptist clinic for your patients, at a time & date to suit you by contacting csadmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au.

We offer various programs to people experiencing vision loss from information sessions through individual programs, peer support and group programs. You can refer any of your patients to explore these programs, by advising them to email CSAdmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au, or call 1800 804 805.

**Acquired Brain Injury and the impact of vision changes**

Acquired brain injury includes concussion, traumatic brain injury, stroke and neuro-degenerative conditions such as meningitis and MS. They can affect people of any age, and of course particularly prevalent is stroke – one of Australia’s biggest killers and a leading cause of disability. Most health professionals and service providers encounter patients with issues caused by ABI at one time or another.

 

Vision changes can occur through injury or illness that affects the structure of the eye, the optic nerve or any of the areas of the brain involved in processing and interpreting optical information

With an Acquired Brain Injury, vision changes are so common that it has led some researchers to conclude that an absence of vision changes would be an exception to the norm and unexpected. For example, studies have shown that more than 50% of ABI patients experience double vision but many fail to report or recognize it during the recovery phase. If vision changes go undetected or unaided, rehabilitation can be less successful and, if the changes are permanent, long-term impact can be dramatic, including poor personal health, quality of life and depression.

**Why are vision changes often missed after ABI?**

1. When a patient suffers a traumatic brain injury, stroke, or other neurological event, the priority of their doctor is to stabilize the patient. Vision is not always discussed in the acute phase of care.
2. Changes in vision can be difficult for the patient to describe.
3. Symptoms can often be attributed to multiple issues arising from the ABI such as impact on speech, motor function and cognition.
4. Many vision symptoms do not surface immediately after the incident or may not become problematic until the person enters into rehabilitation or attempts to return to work.

**What sort of symptoms should you look or listen out for?**

* Asthenopia (eyes feel strained, uncomfortable, or sore)
* Attention or concentration difficulties
* Blurred or fluctuating vision
* Diplopia (double vision)
* Dizziness or nausea
* Balance difficulties
* Fatigues easily (especially with near work, reading, computer)
* Glare sensitivity
* Headaches
* Motion sickness or difficulties with mobility
* Bumps into objects or walls
* Difficulties moving through crowded spaces
* Poor depth perception
* Abnormal posture (head posture, leans to one side, forward or backwards)
* Photophobia (light sensitivity)
* Difficulties with reading fluency or comprehension

**What are the major underlying vision conditions that may be affecting ABI patients?**

Visual field loss (peripheral vision or 'side vision' loss). Also called homonymous hemianopia, meaning vision loss in half of the visual field. Visual field defects can affect 20-57% of individuals who have suffered from a stroke. Can significantly affect mobility and ability to drive.
 Image credit: <http://www.lighthouse.org/>

Focusing & tracking issues can result in headaches, eye strain, fatigue and double vision. They can negatively affect balance, mobility and visual-motor coordination activities. Common focusing conditions are:

* Accommodative dysfunction: impaired eye focusing
* Binocular vision dysfunction: impaired eye teaming, including convergence palsy
* Oculomotor dysfunction: impaired eye movement or tracking
* Strabismus: eye turn, wandering eye, crossed eye

Dry eye syndrome is commonly associated with acquired brain injury. Dry eye can result in burning/stinging, watering eyes, blurred vision and even double vision. Many people experience fluctuating vision after an acquired brain injury and dry eye is a common contributing factor.

Visual processing/perceptual changes – patients can be slow to process or confused by the information they are receiving from their eyes. As a result, they can become lost more easily, easily distracted or distressed, or have a delayed response. Common conditions are:

* Visual neglect (inability to attend to information on one side of the body)
* Visual perceptual deficits or visual agnosia
* Visual-spatial deficits
* Prolonged visual processing speed
* Impaired visual working memory

 Many acquired brain injury patients give up hobbies, work and driving due to unresolved vision issues. Guide Dogs Victoria has the only specialist Acquired Brain Injury vision loss mobility service in Victoria, and all our services are provided at no cost to the patient themselves. This service covers people of all ages, from new born to 90+. We can see patients quickly for assessment. If you have patients you are concerned about, refer them now via [www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au](http://www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au/), or 1800 804 805. One of our friendly practitioners will call them to discuss their situation, and they are under no pressure or cost implications. It might be the turning point they need, and your referral really could change their life.

**Guide Dogs Victoria Case Study: 'There for the journey'**

In 2016 Guide Dogs Victoria got a call from a Melbourne rehab facility about a patient they were very concerned about. John had suffered a stroke at 49 years old, and was frustrated and depressed at his rehab progress. It was very clear that he had suffered sight loss in his right visual field, and had originally been partially paralysed in the right side. Vision loss was one of his initial symptoms that a stroke had happened. In his own words: “The morning of my stroke I was at work as normal, but by late afternoon I felt weird. I had a headache and had lost vision – I could not see my hand & half my face felt missing.”

Despite this, after months of speech, OT, physio, hydro, counselling and a social worker John was still struggling with no help for his vision issues. His life had changed completely and he was very depressed. Unable to drive he lost his license and his job. He didn’t know where to turn. The rehab facility did, and rang us at GDV.

John takes over the story: “Next thing I knew Darlene from Guide Dogs rang me and said “I’m here to help”. I thought ‘wow!’. The next day she came on a home visit. She gave me hope again. She sat down with me and my wife and told me what Guide Dogs did and how they work with my goals and the vision I had left. Darlene organised for my wife & I to go to an ABI Day at GDV Kew. There were guest speakers and I asked a lot of questions. I was impressed at how much help they offered.”

Darlene developed a program for John and went out to his home and local area, teaching him to scan the environment and look for hazards, and use the vision he had left. He still bumped into people and after some discussions, John felt comfortable to use a white (ID) cane. It wasn’t easy of course. John continued to feel up and down because of his lack of independence and frustration with his vision. We put him in touch with a ‘Peer Supporter’, Kevin. Kevin is another client of GDV who had been through what John had been through. He was able to give John tips and listen to what he was feeling, to share his journey.

 

(Using an ID cane and carefully scanning the road by rotating his head enables John to get around more safely and confidently.)

John wrote this to us: “I’m still doing rehab, I need to work hard and do my OT, speech, physio and white cane every day. But it’s a team effort when you go through what I have. Darlene, and my GP are my ‘home rehab team’, along with my family.

My wife and my daughters have been with me every step of this journey and I can’t thank them enough. I’m looking forward. I think there is a future, one day I might work again. My journey continues.”
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For **clients of all ages,** Guide Dogs Victoria offers so much More than Dogs:

* **Low vision orthoptic service** to educate clients and monitor vision issues, assist in making the most of declining vision, assess for magnification/tech aids to assist vision
* **Specialist Occupational Therapy & Assistive Technology advice**to support daily living skills
* **Adult and Child Mobility Service**to support safe independence at home and in the community, including Victoria's only specialist Acquired Brain Injury Mobility service for people experiencing low vision or blindness.

