

Elder Low Vision: Expert Tips to Better Serve Low Vision Seniors

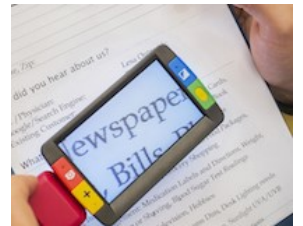
FriendshipWorks' Farsighted Team is committed to collaborating to improve the lives of seniors with vision loss. We asked some of our team members to share their tips on how to better serve low vision elders.

The Optometrist's Role

Low vision optometrist, Dr. Richard Jamara offers these tips to optometrists who work with low vision patients:



- ✓ If you cannot improve the patient's vision you need to improve the patient's visual function. This improvement entails a discussion of low vision devices and/or a referral to an agency like FriendshipWorks or Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (MABVI).
- ✓ The low vision evaluation for an elder will take more time. Do not try to do it all in one visit. Reschedule the patient for another session to discuss low vision solutions.
- ✓ Helping the elder patient with their low vision is a rewarding doctor experience that you do not want to miss. You may be taking care of your next best friend.



Treating the Whole Person

Executive Director of Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Sassy Outwater-Wright offers tips to address the psycho-social, emotional, relational and physical needs of low vision seniors:

- ✓ Refer to low vision rehabilitation, adjustment and/or mental health counseling when necessary, and connect with disability consumer groups to learn skills of self-advocacy, use of assistive technology and peer support.
- ✓ Offer peer support and adjustment counseling that is disability positive and involves caregivers or family and friends. Reduce isolation by educating someone's whole support system on disability in a positive and empowering manner. Vision loss is a traumatic event—eyeballs are connected to the brain, and the brain needs to be part of the vision loss discussion process; mental health adjustment and depression screening are critical components of the low vision exam that are often not included.
- ✓ Ask about lighting in-home. This is a big one that gets missed.
- ✓ Remember that print information access and visual information access are quality of life concerns and need to be given equal weight and consideration to physical access barriers for health, safety, isolation reduction and environmental assessment.



Technology Today and Tomorrow



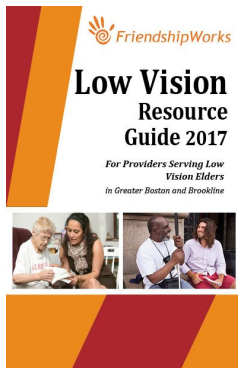
Schepens Eye Research Institute Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Dr. Mojtaba Moharrer offers these tips for integrating technological advances in treating older adults with vision loss:

- ✓ With advancements in technology and specifically Artificial Intelligence, more possibilities are appearing for the visually impaired and elderly communities. Some of these technologies already exist and some are being developed. From the smart watch which automatically contacts emergency services following a fall to apps and devices that "see" the environment and help with mobility and navigation, technology is available that can integrate in and potentially improve the lives of low vision seniors.



- ✓ There is no doubt that technology has many potentials and will have even more to offer in the future, nonetheless it is important to keep in mind that technology does not replace human beings. With issues of loneliness and isolation as growing challenges to quality of life in high income countries, a shift in the conversation from technology taking over key functions in life and living towards technology integrating in and enhancing the fullness of life may be what is needed. For historically displaced communities such as the visually impaired and elderly communities, this is especially essential. With this in mind, low vision seniors as well as their communities, and the institutions charged with their well-being need to become more involved in the design and development of new technologies and solutions from the earliest stages of research.

To learn more about and get involved with research being conducted at Schepens Eye Research Institute please contact us at: VisionTrials@meei.harvard.edu



FriendshipWorks has partnered with Boston's low vision experts to create a Low Vision Resource Guide. The guide is a tool for elder service providers to help you quickly access low vision resources and provide appropriate referrals for older adults.

Download a PDF version of the guide [HERE](#).



You can refer to FriendshipWorks:

By phone at **617-482-1510**

Online at www.fw4elders.org/make-a-referral/