

Vision Loss Has Significant Impact on Hospital Resources and Costs For Older Patients According to Study in JAMA Ophthalmology

Lighthouse Guild Calls for Increased Attention to Addressing Needs Of Patients with Vision Loss

NEW YORK (April 4, 2019) — Visual loss or blindness affects nearly 4 million people in the United States. A national study with broad implications has found that older patients with vision loss who are hospitalized for common disorders are often not identified as requiring special attention, which can affect outcomes, resource use and costs. The study is published in the April 4, issue of JAMA Ophthalmology, authored by Alan R. Morse, JD, PhD, President and CEO of Lighthouse Guild, and co-authors William Seiple, PhD, Paul P. Lee, MD, JD, Joshua D. Stein, MD, MS and Nidhi Talwar, MA.

Identifying the presence of vision loss during hospitalization and employing strategies to assist patients could improve outcomes, reduce readmissions and length of stay, and improve patient satisfaction. If adopted throughout the United States, identifying vision loss during hospitalization could result in a cost-savings of more than \$500 million annually.

“The findings underscore the importance of understanding the needs of patients with vision loss and addressing opportunities to reduce length of hospital stay, improve patient outcomes and reduce costs. This model can and should be applied to make all health care more patient-centric,” said Dr. Morse.

Thousands of Patients Compared

In reaching their conclusions, Dr. Morse and Dr. Seiple of Lighthouse Guild and Dr. Lee, Dr. Stein and Ms. Talwar of the University of Michigan, compared data of more than 12,000 patients with vision loss to the same number of patients without vision loss. All patients were hospitalized for common medical conditions, such as joint replacement, digestive disorders, urinary tract infections, heart failure, or pneumonia.

The Findings

Medicare patients with vision loss experienced longer lengths of stay and increased readmission rates, incurring significantly higher costs than people with no vision loss. Similar findings were found for patients who use commercial insurance.

When the findings were extrapolated nationwide, it was estimated that more than \$500 million in additional annual costs would be spent caring for patients with vision loss.

“The number of people with vision loss is projected to increase substantially as rates of macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and other eye diseases are expected to rise,” noted Dr. Morse. “Now is the time to put systems in place to coordinate care among healthcare practitioners that adequately address the needs associated with vision loss so patients receive appropriate care during hospitalization.”

“Even after discharge,” he added, “coordinating care among healthcare practitioners does not sufficiently address these needs so patients with vision loss continue to experience challenges. Hospitalization is stressful for everyone and particularly difficult for people with vision loss,” said Dr. Morse. “It is important that their caregivers understand the consequences of vision loss on care needs during hospitalizations and afterward, and identify strategies to minimize any potential negative impact.”

For a copy of the article, visit JAMA Ophthalmology or email JAMA Ophthalmology at mediarelations@jamanetwork.org.

About Lighthouse Guild

Lighthouse Guild is the leading organization dedicated to addressing and preventing vision loss. For more information, visit Lighthouseguild.org.

About the Study Authors

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