

My name is Janice Clowes and I am a 67 year old retiree from the State of Maine. My insurance is Aetna Medicare and I am happy with most of the coverage. However, in December of 2019, I noticed my vision was bit off. I got into my eye doctor the same day. She immediately referred me to Eyecare Medical Group in Portland, where I was seen the following day. An ophthalmologist diagnosed me with a detached retina in my right eye with added complications of multiple holes in the retina and the detachment being in behind the eye. I had surgery to repair it the following Wednesday. The recovery included keeping my head down for one week except for the regimen of eye-drops. A gas bubble had been placed in my eye to hold the reattached retina down. I had very limited and blurred vision, basically seeing light and dark without form and having no peripheral vision.

In February I noticed that my already limited vision was worse. I returned to Eyecare Medical Group and was diagnosed with a detached retina in the same eye but in a different place. I had a second surgery to repair the tear, had the gas bubble removed and an air bubble put in place to hold the retina in place. Again the recovery required me to keep my head down for a week and an eye-drop regimen.

The trauma from the surgeries caused significant issues with my cornea and I developed neurotrophic keraconjunctivitis in my right eye. As a proactive approach to healing my eye issue, the specialist discussed treating my eye with two specialized eye-drops that he felt would substantially improve my cornea issues. After checking on the cost, one was immediately ruled out because it cost \$100,000. The second one was cheaper but all costs for Vital Tears (which are made from my blood) are out of pocket at a cost of \$120 per month.

These eye-drops worked well enough that I was able to have a third surgery to remove the air bubble and a cataract. My vision in the right eye is 20/400. I have a fourth surgery scheduled for February 16th. I was told that people who go on Vital Tears typically stay on them for life. They are a requirement to keep my vision in my right eye. I also had the phlebotomist tell me that she has an 84 year old client on Medicaid that was told that she the Vital Tears were the only treatment keeping her from going blind.

My husband and I are on a fixed income. To pay for the monthly cost we refinanced our home and extended the payments from a 15 year mortgage to a 30 year mortgage. We are in the too rich to be poor and too poor to be rich category.

My vision is worth the struggle, but it doesn't feel right that the prescription that will keep me seeing isn't covered by insurance or kept at an affordable cost.

Thank you.

Janice Clowes