

Free Medical Retina for the Poor

Abstract

Treatment of retinal disease can be a huge burden for the patients causing financial issues and thus can be added to war circumstances that made poverty pandemic especially in elderly individuals, so the free medical retina service can offer relief and improve quality of life for the poor by funding it from rich people using the zakkah system.

Short Communication

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Introduction

As war begun in Aleppo Syria, poverty has become pandemic and a lot of elderly people become without support where diabetes mellitus and hypertension are very common in Aleppo, retinal disease may require multiple and repeated procedures such as intravitreal injections and laser treatments, thus will be a huge burden for elderly poor people. So there should be a solution to prevent blindness without causing financial burden for the poor so I had to initiate the FMRS (Free Medical Retina for the Poor) program.

Background

In the beginning of circumstances Marashi Eye Clinic has opened a Free Eye Clinic to examine poor patients for free, as this free clinic is run by me, I found there is a demand for both cataract surgery and medical retina, and in the long follow up I realized that patients with retinal diseases has dropped the follow up as they can't afford it, where some of patients become blind because they simply can't pay for the treatment. Nevertheless, there is a huge problem to store and safely deliver the medications in long term power outages. So I am facing two problems 1st safety and 2nd financial support, for the former, Marashi Eye Clinic administer and store all intravitreal injections in hospital operating room as most of hospital operating rooms are hygiene, have 24/7 electricity and working refrigerators.

Financial support

FMRS project is funded by the Zakkah system (ZAKKAH is every rich Muslim pays a poor 2.5% of his annually income) Because our free clinic accepts poor patients referred to us by other organizations, as treating retinal diseases is expansive and patients are extremely poor; in other words we use ZAKKAH system to prevent blindness in poor people.

How it works?

As we gained a lot of trust via our years of work a rich people (one of them is my own patient) fund me with their annual 2.5% income and I purchase Anti-VEGF agents, laser sessions and OCT sessions, all intravitreal injections are held in operation room in the hospital, this service only available for poor patients, in this situation I wave my fees (i.e. I don't benefit economically) and the patient only pays hospital admission fees which is less than 3 USD (if it is hard for the patient to pay it, I pay it for him if I had extra

zakkah money) and post injections eye drops (which sometimes I provide it to them), As repeated injections are needed we provide them as long as the funding is available.

We have been in this project since FEB 2016 and thank God there is a clinically significant improvement of vision in poor patients with retinal diseases and the program include about 100 patients providing them free medical retinal service, treating Retinal diseases such as diabetic macular edema, proliferative diabetic retinopathy, retinal vein occlusion and choroidal neovascularization due to age related macular degeneration and myopia FMRS program is not limited to patients only, this program helps to train young retinal fellows and ophthalmologists to interpret OCT, Fluorescein angiography, B-scan, to administer intravitreal injections, to deliver laser and most important to take safe and effective treatment decisions.

Future Directions

After one year of FMRS program we are trying our best to provide Free or at least minimum cost for vitrectomy for the poor along with micropulse laser. We hope that FMRS will still have financial support to keep providing service for the poor and prevent blindness, and have enough support to purchase intravitreal steroids such as Ozurdex so to reduce the burden of close follow up and repeated injections in chronic retinal cases such as chronic diabetic macular edema [1].

Conclusion

FMRS is program to help prevent blindness due to retinal diseases in poor people by taking small amount of money from the rich people and purchase intravitreal agents, OCT, and laser sessions.

References

1. Boyer DS, Yoon YH, Belfort R, Bandello F, Maturi RK, et al. (2014) Three-year, randomized, sham-controlled trial of dexamethasone intravitreal implant in patients with diabetic macular edema 121(10): 1904-1914.