

Patients with low vision benefit from treatment, personalized care



LaVerne Grapenthien reads with the help of a closed-circuit television device.

Did you know that one in four adults over the age of 75 in the United States has low vision?

That's why Ingalls created a Low Vision Program at the Ingalls Center for Outpatient Rehabilitation (ICOR) in Calumet City.

Developed by Ingalls occupational therapists Barb Cueller, COTA/L, and Tammy Price, OTR/L, and offered in conjunction with the services of a low-vision optometrist from the Chicago Lighthouse, the program helps to make the most of a person's remaining vision, while fostering safety and independence for individuals in their own environments.

"Vision is a complex sense," explained Price. "While most visual changes can be corrected by glasses, medicine or surgery, visual changes caused by eye disease, poor health or injury can cause permanent vision loss."

If the loss is total, the result is blindness. If it is partial, the result is a vision impairment known as "low vision." The most common causes of low vision include macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, glaucoma, stroke or brain injury.

"Individuals with low vision are not blind; they still have some usable vision, but they may not know how to use their remaining vision to perform their daily living activities," Cueller added.

LaVerne Grapenthien, 83, of Lansing, said that the resources that she received through the Low Vision Program changed her life.

Shortly after being diagnosed with macular degeneration in both eyes, Grapenthien was referred to the Low Vision Program. Thanks to financial support from the Lions Club in Lansing, Grapenthien not only has a lighted magnifier and a telescope device for watching TV, she also has a closed-circuit television to

assist her while she reads and writes.

"I don't know what I would do without all of these aids," Grapenthien said. "I couldn't read any longer, but the Low Vision Program helped me regain independence that I lost because of my sight."

Cueller also did an evaluation of Grapenthien's home, placing special marking devices on her oven. "I can get my oven going now and really cook," she said.

Other resources available through the Low Vision Program include help with transportation, psycho-social support for individuals suffering from depression as a result of their condition, referrals to the Chicago Lighthouse for the visually impaired and local support groups. Most individuals who are referred to the Low Vision Program receive four to six weeks of therapy and support, and in most instances, the program is covered by Medicare. For more information, please call 708.915.4721 <