CASE STUDY DISCUSSION:
CATARACTS … overcoming barriers to surgery

THINK

A lady comes to see you to have a chat about her eyes. Over the past year, she has noticed her vision getting ‘hazy’, a bit like in the second picture shown below:

She now has difficulty seeing well enough to do things like read the paper; she has also stopped driving at night because she doesn’t feel safe. You check her vision and it is:

R 6/18+1 L 6/12-1

With a pin-hole her vision is: R 6/12-2, L 6/9+2

You check her medical record and see that the optometrist diagnosed cataracts at her last eye exam a year ago, and referred her to the ophthalmologist for cataract surgery. However, the patient did not attend the ophthalmology appointment on two occasions.

You decide to talk with her about that, and discover she does not want the operation because she fears what will happen during the surgery. What do you do?
BACKGROUND INFO

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians currently have 12x higher rate of blinding cataracts, compared to the wider Australian population.¹ This can be attributed to a number of factors, including geographic remoteness and limited access to visiting eye care services, logistical difficulties about travelling to major towns to undergo cataract surgery, reluctance or fear about the surgery or hospital, an acceptance of vision loss as a ‘normal’ part of ageing, etc.

The good news about cataracts is it is an entirely treatable (fixable) form of vision loss ... surgery with implant of an intra-ocular lens can completely restore vision to its normal level, provided the health of the internal eye is fine. Therefore, one of the major approaches to reducing rates of cataract and associated blindness is to increase access to and uptake of cataract surgery. There may be some common-held ‘myths’ about cataract surgery and what it involves for many people thinking about the operation -not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

LET’S GET TALKING …

1. Clinical questions:

What answers/advice do you give this lady, when she asks you the following questions:

Will they take my eye out during surgery?

Will I be awake for the operation?

How long will it take?

Will I need to use medicine?

Can I fix the cataracts with some eye drops?

Will I be able to see straight after the operation?

2. Your experiences...

- Are there examples from your region or clinical experience of people who were very reluctant to go through with cataract surgery? What are some of the reasons for this reluctance? In those cases, what are some approaches that are useful in educating and encouraging patients to proceed with sight-restoring cataract surgery?

- What tools/resources do you have available to help explain cataract surgery and its outcomes? Similarly, do you have a story to share about patients who decided to proceed with cataract surgery, and have acted as ‘ambassadors’ for surgery in their communities?

3. Overcoming barriers to cataract surgery for remote communities:

- What some of the things that encourage people living in remote communities to go through with cataract surgery - can you provide specific examples?

**SOME USEFUL RESOURCES**

Click on the below link to find some publications about cataracts and cataract surgery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- [http://www.icee.org/resources/I_see_for_culture/Pdfs/Flip%20Chart%20TCD%20and%20your%20eyes.pdf](http://www.icee.org/resources/I_see_for_culture/Pdfs/Flip%20Chart%20TCD%20and%20your%20eyes.pdf)

And here is a movie of what happens during cataract surgery:

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aohAHNYpAOs&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aohAHNYpAOs&feature=related)

*If you have more resources to share with the group, please do!*