Patient with Excellent Vision 50 Years After Diagnosis Makes Gift to Support Bascom Palmer

Val Fishman was 17 years old when she was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, a disease that brings a heightened risk for eye complications and blindness. Now, more than fifty years later, her vision is almost perfect, and she is grateful to Harry W. Flynn Jr., M.D., professor of ophthalmology at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, who has been her ophthalmologist for most of that time.

“Diabetics often develop diabetic retinopathy, which can cause loss of reading and driving vision and, in some cases, total blindness,” said Dr. Flynn, who specializes in medical and surgical treatment of diseases of the retina and vitreous. “With current treatments and regular follow-up exams, we are generally successful at stabilizing or improving visual acuity.”

Fishman clearly recalls her first visit to an ophthalmologist when she was living in Canada. Once the doctor learned she was diabetic, he incorrectly told her that all diabetics go blind, and that she would as well. “I left there in tears, and I was determined to prove that he was wrong.”
Fishman and her husband eventually moved to South Florida, and she became Dr. Flynn’s patient in 1985. Dr. Flynn diagnosed her with mild diabetic retinopathy and said it did not require treatment. Approximately 10 years later, her vision deteriorated and he performed focal laser surgery for her diabetic macular edema in both eyes. In 2007, her vision worsened and he gave Val the first of many intravitreal injections in both eyes.

“I have always had complete confidence in Dr. Flynn,” said Fishman. “He has exceptional clinical judgement and only recommends treatment when necessary. Under his care and guidance for the past 38 years, I have been able to enjoy the things I love, including world travel.”

Diabetics Need the Care of Vision Experts

Dr. Flynn is not surprised by Fishman's good vision.

“Val does a good job of managing her diabetes to give her the best chance for a good outcome,” said Dr. Flynn. “She controls her blood sugar and blood pressure levels, maintains a normal weight for her age and build, and has frequent checkups.”

He stresses that all diabetics should have vision experts on their health care team.

“Finding and treating problems early is often the key to saving sight,” said Dr. Flynn. “At Bascom Palmer, our patients have access to sophisticated diagnostic tools and groundbreaking clinical trials, so their care and treatment is based on the most up-to-date knowledge and research.”

The institute offers a variety of treatment options, including
focal and scatter laser treatments, vitrectomy and pharmacologic therapies. One of the most popular pharmacologic therapies is injections of anti-VEGF medicines that stabilize vision and often improve visual acuity. Dr. Flynn estimates that doctors at Bascom Palmer perform approximately 25,000 intravitreal injections annually.

In gratitude, Fishman and her husband, Marc Fishman, M.D., have pledged to match gifts up to a total of $50,000.

“This is our way of giving back to Bascom Palmer for the wonderful care Val has received,” said Dr. Fishman. “We feel fortunate to have had access to the latest treatments and technologies, as well as the finest physicians, especially Dr. Flynn.”