

A VAST INroad in Treating Macular Degeneration

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Good news and hope

Macular degeneration is a dreaded condition which some of us will have to deal with as we advance in age. That is why it is sometimes called *Age* related *macular degeneration* or AMD. Let me start with the good news. While there is still no magic bullet for the treatment of macular degeneration, we are coming close. The last few years witnessed a dramatic improvement in the development of medications for AMD.



Brief story of AMD and recent treatment options

A common denominator between macular degeneration and cancer is the abnormal vessels that develop, feeding and worsening the condition. This is believed to be stimulated at least in part by so called VEGF (Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor). Drug companies have wisely designed more than one anti-VEGF medication to help shut off the offending abnormal blood vessels and slow down cancers on one hand and treat macular degeneration on the other. AVASTIN is a drug that was originally designed and is still used to treat cancer. It was found to be very effective for treating the wet form of macular degeneration too. While the (FDA approved, very costly, LUCENTIS) drug that was originally designed for the treatment of wet macular degeneration by the same company is still available, the vast majority of retinal specialists administer AVASTIN.

Words of Caution

- 1) The form of macular degeneration that responds to AVASTIN is the *wet* form not the dry form. The wet form is however the most aggressive and most dreaded.
- 2) Not everyone will respond and response may vary from one individual to the next.
- 3) A head to head study comparing Lucentis to Avastin is ongoing. Results are due in 2011.
- 4) Multiple injections are usually required.

Summary of good news

- 1) Treatment is finally available for the treatment of the wet form of macular degeneration.
- 2) The cost of treatment is covered by most insurance carriers including Medicare and this cost is very reasonable compared to other options that appear to be no better than AVASTIN.
- 3) The treatment is available locally. You can call me or a qualified colleague for evaluation and possible treatment for yourself or a loved one.

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