

**Histoplasmosis Syndrome:  
My Experience with an Ocular Injection**

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*One year ago, January, 2015*

“There appears to be some discoloration near your retina, Ms. Grubb.”

I looked at the pictures on the computer screen in front of me that Dr. Brown, my usual optometrist, had taken of my eye. The small, white membrane that rested near the retina in my left eye unsettled me.

Dr. Brown could sense my uneasiness. “I wouldn’t worry about it though. The likeliness of this ever affecting your eyesight is slim to none,” he reassured me. I blocked what I had seen from my mind, and continued with my appointment to get new glasses.

I wish I had never listened to his advice. Because of his “reassurance,” I would forget about the small mass found in my eye during a routine eye exam for nearly a year. Once I did remember, it was already too late.

*January 11, 2016*

I woke up at around nine o'clock as I do every morning. It was winter break and I didn't have to go back to college for another week, so I decided to lounge around my apartment and spend most of the day on social media. I sleepily reached for my phone that was sitting on my nightstand. As I began scrolling through statuses, I noticed it was very hard to distinguish some of the words and letters. I assumed it was because I wasn't wearing my glasses, and promptly placed them on my face. I tried to read again, but soon realized my glasses didn't help. I closed my right eye to see if I could read with one eye open, but quickly, for the first time, noticed a white circle in the center of my vision, embellished with a rainbow effect. This circle affected my vision dramatically, but being the stubborn person I am, I told myself it was nothing. Later that day, I mentioned it to my boyfriend when he came home from work. With a worried look, he advised me to seek medical help because my condition sounded like a symptom of retinal detachment. Just to make him happy, I promised to make an appointment sometime that week.

Two days later, I drove from Johnson City to Greeneville, Tennessee to visit my grandfather. As I was telling my grandfather about my eye, he stopped me mid-sentence and exclaimed, "You need to make an appointment right now." After finally being persuaded, I called the Greeneville Eye Clinic, and after explaining my predicament, I was able to get an appointment for that day.

I arrived for my appointment and was almost immediately taken back to a room. Numbing and dilation drops were administered only to my left eye, and I was asked to read a set of letters and numbers with a small, black apparatus that covered one eye at a time. I glided

through with ease with my right eye, but could not make out a single letter or number due to the white circle in my vision with my left eye. Dr. Urban, who is a tall woman with braces and a long, white, doctor's coat, walked into the room and asked, "So what's wrong with your eye?" I explained the dilemma with my eye to her.

She slid my face into a machine and began looking into my eye. When she finished, she handed me a small pad of paper with a grid in the center. She told me to cover my left eye and stare at the grid. She asked me if it looked normal and I replied, "Yes." She then instructed me to cover my right eye and stare at the grid once more. This time when I looked at the grid, the lines in the upper left corner were bending and moving around the white circle in my vision. "Is there anything wrong with the grid now?" she asked. "Oh yes," I replied quickly, "the lines are bent right here." I pointed to the upper left quartile of the grid. She whispered something to the technician in the room, but I was unable to interpret what she said. The technician left the room and does not return. Dr. Urban looked at me and explained that we would need to go into another room with a different machine so she could take a picture of the back of my eye.

We walked down the hallway to another room that was almost completely dark. She guided me to a swivel chair on one side of a desk. "Okay, I need you to look into that hole in this machine and stare at the red dot in the center," she requested. I did exactly what she said. After the picture was taken, she turned a computer monitor beside her around and showed me the pictures. In the picture, I could see a very large, milky colored mass near my retina. All of the memories of the eye appointment from the year before flashed back into my mind and I suddenly became nauseous. Dr. Urban explained to me that the mass was affecting my eyesight, and she needed to refer me to a specialist.

*Six days later, January 19, 2016*

After getting lost in the Med Tech Plaza in Johnson City, I finally found the Southeastern Retina Associates office. To my surprise, it is located inside a Bank of Tennessee. I walked inside, filled out the necessary paperwork, and took a seat. After a few minutes, a technician called my name and ushered me into a room. She administered drops into my eyes and explained to me that I might need to have to have a shot of Iodide so better pictures could be taken of my eye. I shivered at the thought of a needle being injected into my skin. Needles are my biggest fear, and I hoped I wouldn't have a panic attack that day due to a needle. It turned out that I didn't need an Iodide injection, and was able to get the pictures taken of my eye without the intravenous injection. I was taken into a room where an older man in a lab coat was sitting in a chair.

“Hello, Kelsey, I'm Dr. Cummings,” he said shyly, “I've been looking at your pictures of your eye, and I think I know what's wrong with your eye.” I sat down on the chair in the middle of the room and listened intently.

“It appears that you had mold in your eye at one point in time. Since the spores are very common here in the south, you most likely got the infection from inhaling it. Spores travelled from your lungs to a layer of blood vessels in the back of your eye, called the choroid. The infection went away, but the blood vessels began to grow abnormally, which is why you can see a white circle in your vision. The vessels grew into a mass,” he explained. “You have Histoplasmosis Syndrome. We can actually take care of this right now, if you'd like. All we'll need to do is inject some medicine into your eyeball.”

He began to explain to me that my eyesight will never fully come back, and that I most likely will lose my vision in my left within the next few years. The ocular injections will slow the process down, and maybe even make it stop for a short time. If the injections do make the circle in my vision stop growing, I can stop the injections, but since my condition is chronic, I will most likely have to get an injection in my eye every month for the rest of my life.

“Wow,” I uttered, “I don’t think I can handle that today. That was a lot to take in.”

“I understand,” he reassured, “we will schedule the appointment for Thursday, okay?”

*Two days later, January 21, 2016*

I arrived to my appointment at the Northeastern Retina Associates office in Kingsport, Tennessee more anxious and scared than I had anticipated. I had felt so confident in myself the night before. I had encouraged myself that I could handle it, and here I was, just minutes before my procedure more nervous than I had ever been. I sighed as I sat in the waiting room and told myself over and over again that it was going to be okay. My boyfriend decided to come to my appointment with me so I wouldn’t have to drive myself. He tried to reassure me that it wouldn’t be so bad, but ended up freaking himself out. To calm myself, I gazed at the snow out the window. Seeing the white, frozen landscape somewhat made me calm.

“Kelsey Grubb,” a technician I had seen before at the other office said to me with a wide smile. I sighed once again with my heart beating nearly out of my chest, and tried to force a smile back. I followed her to a room with a large, black chair that was halfway reclined. I sat down in the chair as my boyfriend found a small, swivel chair across the room to sit in. The nurse immediately put four eye drops into my left eye. “These drops are numbing drops,” she

explained, “I’ll be back in a few minutes to put some more in.” She stepped out and began gossiping with the other technicians in the hallway. I tried to listen to their conversation so I wouldn’t worry myself about the injection.

Dr. Cummings walked into the room, and the first thing I noticed in his hands were a small syringe and a large pair of clamps. “Alright Ms. Grubb,” he said, “I know that the last time we met you were given a lot of information that might have seemed a little too much to take in at the time. When I put this in your eye,” he says as he motions towards the needle in his hand, “you might feel a bit of pressure in and on your eyeball.”

“Okay. I’m going to see everything, right?” I asked nervously.

“Oh yes,” he replied, “you’ll see the whole procedure.”

My stomach began knotting up as the words spilled from his mouth. Before I could even reply, a technician quickly grabbed my head back. I looked up and saw a bottle with strange, brown liquid sloshing around inside. The technician administered the drop into my eye and I immediately felt the most horrible burning and itching sensation I had ever felt in my life. The pain was excruciating, almost unbearable. It felt as if acid and gritty sand had been dumped into my eye. I opened my eyes as I tried to withstand the pain from the brown liquid and saw a large, silver clamp dangerously close to my eye. It clamped my eyeball and almost pulled it out of the socket. I couldn’t move my eye, and could only see a silver ring around my acute vision. I saw the doctor’s hand come closer and closer towards my eye with the syringe. He pulled my bottom lid down, and I felt a deep pressure in the lower region of my eyeball. I could feel the cold liquid enter my irritated and burning eyeball, followed by a slight pinch. I could see the liquid floating around in my eye as if it were a tiny, black blob. After what seemed like an eternity, I felt the

sharp, metal syringe withdraw and the quick release of the clamp that entrapped my eyeball. Icy cold liquid doused my eye and a tissue suddenly appeared in front of me.

“Dry your eye, please,” a technician kindly instructed. I wiped the liquid from around my eye. Another waterfall of the cold liquid hit my eye again, and I began to pat the liquid away once more.

“You’re all done!” Dr. Cummings exclaimed, “You can go to the front desk and set up your next intravitreal injection appointment for next month.”

I made my way to the front desk. As the receptionist assigned my next appointment, the burning sensation I had felt during the procedure began to intensify to the point where I could barely stand still. It eventually went away after a few hours, but I will never forget the pain. I would never wish that onto my worst enemy. Because of my Histoplasmosis Syndrome, I will most likely have to endure that wretched pain once a month for the rest of my life.