



July 25, 2013

To: DSHS Children's Administration Administrators & Staff

As a family physician in the state of Washington, I am writing to express my deep concern and alarm as I have learned about a huge hidden epidemic of undiagnosed vision problems in our children. Due to a long standing system failure, most children in our state do not get examined or even screened for binocular dysfunctions.

We do screen for distance vision with the Snellen chart but this does NOT screen for binocular dysfunctions (an inability of the eyes to work together and function well at close range which is needed for reading). Shockingly, in most of the screenings that I am aware of 25-30% of children have some level of binocular dysfunction. Yes, 25-30% of our school age children have a vision problem that is preventing them from being able to learn properly as about 80% of learning occurs through the visual system. What's more this problem is treatable in the majority of cases, but not with glasses or surgery.

In studies of children who are placed in special education classes, other remedial education classes and those identified as juvenile offenders the rates of binocular dysfunction are between 50-70%. These children have a correctable vision problem that is now being totally missed by the health care and educational systems. And I think it is safe to say that at least some of their problems of failure to thrive in society and in the education system are due to an inability of their eyes to function well together, a skill that is mandatory for negotiating the educational system.

Now that this problem is being brought to our attention, I feel it is vital that we take action and correct our societal oversight that has such devastating effects for this huge segment of our school age population. Certainly any child at risk, including all foster children, children with special needs, children in any type of special education or struggling in school and all juvenile offenders need to have a comprehensive vision exam by a developmental optometrist who has the ongoing experience and expertise in diagnosing all the binocular dysfunctions.

I urge you as members of the children's administration, who's important mission is to identify the needs of children and assure their safety and well-being, to become aware of this overlooked problem of binocular dysfunction in our children and use your talents and skills to be a part of the solution.

Thank you,

Mary Pellicer, MD