

Tunnel Vision Pitfalls

By Claudia Nosseir

In the ever-changing world of healthcare, doctors undergo rigorous training to acquire the skills necessary to diagnose and treat patients successfully. However, a disturbing trend has been emerging, one that frequently makes headlines and leaves families in pain: misdiagnoses and delayed treatments are contributing to the tragic loss of lives within the hospital system. Is this an inevitable part of the medical landscape, or is there an opportunity for real change? The concept of “tunnel vision” is a central factor in these scenarios, where healthcare providers concentrate on one aspect of care to the detriment of overall patient management. This is a story about one mother’s personal experience who almost lost her son because of this concerning trend.

A Mother’s Perspective: A Personal Encounter with Tunnel Vision

A seemingly innocent case of



(Nosseir)

Encephalitis survivor, Reid attends his dream Yankee Game at Yankee Stadium. Had the tunnel vision been followed through with, the outcome would have been very different.

the flu marked the beginning of this family’s traumatic journey. Her young son fell sick with a fever, and a week later, the situation took a shocking turn. His legs buckled and wouldn’t

support his weight, his hands became paralyzed, and his speech deteriorated into an unintelligible slur. Concerned, the mother rushed her son to the hospital. Initially, doctors

considered the possibility of a brain tumour.

Then, without notice, the doctors pivoted in their diagnosis, offering a new narrative. Instead of a tumour, they suggested that a virus might be at the root of the symptoms. Such swift changes in diagnosis left the family in a state of profound confusion, with no clear answers or direction.

Despite the medical team’s shifting diagnosis, the mother remained steady in her belief that something more grave was happening. She begged for an MRI to validate the doctors’ claims that this was only a virus.

The road to securing the MRI was far from smooth. After four days of relentless pleading, a CT scan finally took place, revealing the shocking truth: her son’s brain and brainstem were covered with expansive lesions, which if got any bigger would cut off his oxygen supply to the brain. The severity of the situation caused the mother to almost collapse but she knew she had

to remain strong to continue to support and advocate for her 10-year-old boy.

The Race Against Time: Tunnel Vision's Toll

In response to the dire findings of the CT, the hospital's atmosphere transformed into a scene from a movie. Doctors and nurses rushed as they made arrangements to transfer him to SickKids Hospital as they were not capable of handling such a trauma.

Before boarding the ambulance, the mother was approached by the chief of pediatrics and the hospital's administrator, who requested a private meeting in a boardroom. Their message was clear: they apologized for the tunnel vision that had clouded their judgment. They acknowledged that their narrow focus has impeded successful treatment. However, this apology was too little, too late. The mother could not accept their apology, for the prognosis for her son remained bleak.

The Anatomy of Tunnel Vision: A Diagnosis Derailed

A situation where healthcare

professionals become fixated on a single aspect of patient care, frequently at the expense of the bigger picture, is referred to as "tunnel vision".

In the context of the medical world, it is the same as placing blinders on to focus solely on one diagnosis. This phenomenon is not limited to a single medical specialty but can occur in various fields, often leading to grave consequences.

The mother's story serves as a poignant example of tunnel vision in action. When her son presented with severe symptoms, the

“It's only a virus..”

initial assessment leaned toward a brain tumour, an understandable concern given the gravity of the situation. However, a swift shift in diagnosis, from a tumour to a virus, highlights a key problem associated with tunnel vision: the inability to maintain a consistent and comprehensive perspective.

A Three-Pronged Approach to Remedying Tunnel Vision



(Nosseir)

Reid learning how to play wheelchair basketball at Bloorview Rehabilitation Hospital.

In the wake of this traumatic ordeal, the need for change within the medical community becomes needed. Lives can be saved, and families can be spared the agony of unnecessary deaths and misdiagnoses. To address the issue of tunnel vision, a three-pronged approach should be considered.

Listening to the Patient:

The cornerstone of healthcare has always been the patient. A healthcare provider's first duty is to listen intently to the patient's narrative of their symptoms and experiences. After all, they are the ones

enduring the distressing journey of illness. By truly hearing the patient's story, healthcare providers can gain insights coupled with diagnostic tests and clinical examinations.

Listening to the Family:

Family members are an invaluable resource in patient care. They often serve as the bridge between the patient and the medical team, offering essential information about the patient's symptoms, medical history, and changes in behaviour. Their insights can provide a more comprehensive overview of the patient's

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Reid laying in a hospital bed at SickKids receiving a special visit from a therapy dog as part of a healing program at the hospital.

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Letting Go of Ego

One of the primary challenges associated with tunnel vision is the inability to detach from preconceived notions or assumptions. Doctors must learn to relinquish their egos when facing a medical puzzle. In the world of diagnosis, there is no room for stubborn adherence

to initial perspectives; instead, a blank slate, free from the influence of previous diagnoses, is essential for accurate patient assessment.

In Summary

The traumatic experience of one family highlights how urgently the medical field has to change. Unfortunately, this case is one among thousands of stories. 🐾