Glaucoma Chats

TRANSCRIPT

A Personal Journey with Glaucoma: A Conversation with BrightFocus President & CEO Stacy Haller

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Featuring: Stacy Pagos Haller

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Please note: This Chat has been edited for clarity and brevity.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Hello and welcome. My name is Dr. Jimmy Liu, and I am the Director of Vision Science Programs at BrightFocus Foundation. I am pleased to be your host for today's Glaucoma Chat, "A Personal Journey with Glaucoma: A Conversation with BrightFocus President and CEO Stacy Haller." Glaucoma Chats are a monthly program presented in partnership with the American Glaucoma Society and supported in part by sponsorship from Glaukos, designed to provide people living with glaucoma and the family and friends who support them with information straight from the experts.

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BrightFocus Foundation's National Glaucoma Research Program is one of the world's leading nonprofit funders of glaucoma research and has supported more than $55 million in scientific grants, exploring the root causes, prevention strategies, and treatments to end this sightstealing disease.

Now, I have the special pleasure of introducing today's guest speaker, who is the … who's BrightFocus' President and CEO, Stacy Pagos Haller. Since joining BrightFocus in 2010, Stacy has significantly expanded BrightFocus' stature as a prominent funder of Alzheimer's disease, macular degeneration, and glaucoma scientific research and has provided critical information to millions of affected individuals about these diseases. Stacy, thank you so much for joining us today.

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Thank you, Jimmy. It's a pleasure to be here.

DR. JIMMY LIU: It's so awesome to have you on the call today, Stacy. So, thanks for coming on and to share your personal story with us. So, let's start from the beginning. How did you first learn that you had glaucoma? Was it at a routine eye exam, or did you experience changes in your vision?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: You know, Jimmy, that's a great question. It was actually through a routine eye exam. I wasn't experiencing any changes in vision, and I was sort of taken completely aback when I learned that I had become a glaucoma suspect and a glaucoma patient that would start to need to take drops.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Thanks so much for sharing that, Stacy. Yeah. I think a lot of people on this call can relate because glaucoma is termed the "silent thief of sight," and so it is important to go to your eye doctor to get these routine exams to make sure that you can catch these early. So how has glaucoma impacted your daily life? What has been the most challenging part of living with glaucoma?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: The most challenging part is just this overall fear from the time of diagnosis, and I'm also of the age where my eyes are progressing toward cataracts and that procedure. And you're just painfully more aware—not with pain—but with visual clarity that your eyes are not as great as they once were, so that you take a lot more care. I always wear sunglasses, but I live sort of in a state of great concern. Sometimes my eyes are dry. And in the beginning, I was terribly afraid of missing putting any drops in my eyes because I thought, "Oh my god, I can't even feel a difference and something could happen." And so taking those drops to me was surviving, but that's a big change of life when you realize you're going to have to do something the same. And it went from one [time a] day now to two times a day. It's not like it's ever-present, but there's enough of a reminder in vision that it's a serious disease—a disease to take seriously.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Absolutely, Stacy, for sure. And so, how has working at BrightFocus Foundation changed your understanding of glaucoma?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Well, Jimmy, you hit the first point with your comment that most people don't even know that they have glaucoma or are at risk for glaucoma if they're not getting regular eye checks, and that's a pretty important piece. So, the understanding of glaucoma starts with people getting their eyes checked. And what I've also learned about the understanding of glaucoma is while there are great treatments, there's still a lot of unknown questions about the progression of the disease, how it starts, and where even better places may be or different ways to intervene that are not as onerous as the treatments that are existent today. So, I have the benefit of talking

with the world's best researchers that are trying to make a difference in this disease every day, and many of them have connections to the disease. But they are an army of wonderful human beings who are really trying to improve our lives through making sure our vision stays strong.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Absolutely, Stacy. Yeah, I totally agree. And we can talk about this a little bit more during the Chat about how BrightFocus is doing so much to find cures, treatments, and preventative measures for glaucoma. And we really have to thank our Scientific Review Committee, who volunteers their time to review and find the most rigorous and scientifically innovative research projects to help change the trajectory of this disease. In what ways has having glaucoma shaped your leadership as the CEO of BrightFocus Foundation and changed how you think about the organization's missions and priorities?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Well, probably the most obvious answer to that is that I understand the fear and the angst that comes along with a diagnosis that you risk becoming blind if you're not taking care of yourself and following the eye care provider's directions on how to take care of your eyes. What it has done is just, always had the passion for the mission of BrightFocus, but what it's done is, really, brought the drive home to support innovative research and do whatever it takes that I can do in this position to help address unmet needs in the field and in the research community to accelerate better treatments until we have a way to prevent and cure this disease. And I think the other piece is—what we talked about before—getting information to the public, so, one, they understand the latest information that the scientific community has uncovered, discovered, and how that may affect their lives. And then, the second piece is making sure that people are getting their eyes checked. This is one of those diseases where you can help slow the progression by taking a simple step, like getting your eyes checked. So, having a program like this and getting more information out and making it free and accessible to people is really important, and the access to this information is really important. So, those are things that I think about and focus on, because I'm feeling it myself.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Thanks so much, Stacy, for those insights about living with glaucoma, the challenges faced by patients and families, and why funding glaucoma research is so important to you personally. I think we had a listener question—which is a really great question—and it's: What kind of glaucoma research is supported? And so, how about, I can go take that.

As the Director of Vision Science Programs, I help steward our National Glaucoma Research program, which funds researchers from across the world to study different

aspects of how to cure, treat, and find different preventative ways to treat glaucoma. This could be through controlling eye pressure in novel ways. It could be done through finding ways to protect or regenerate the optic nerve, which is that cord that connects the brain and the eye. And in glaucoma, the optic nerve starts to degenerate or lose over time, which is why you lose your sight. And we also fund a lot of really innovative and cutting-edge ideas for new treatments for glaucoma. Those are the different types of glaucoma research that we support. Stacy, how do you see research improving the lives of people diagnosed with glaucoma in the coming years? What are you excited about?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Well, I think, Jimmy, you touched on some of it. It's the nature of the research that we've been able to fund that doesn't look at sort of incremental changes, but more of a high-risk, high-reward, or game-changing opportunity by the ideas that the scientists present to us. And that the progression of understanding is getting better and better, which means the points where treatment can be introduced or taken will get better in the coming years. Most importantly, that understanding will lead to a prevention strategy. And what excites me about eventually reaching that stage is it means that our loved ones won't be as much at risk as they are today. And that's why I'm a true believer in what BrightFocus does.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Yeah, absolutely. Totally agree there. What's really amazing is that the research that has been done in glaucoma over the past few years, I feel like in the next 5 or 10 years, there's going to be a lot of really exciting clinical trials and new novel ways to treat glaucoma. And so, I think everyone on the call should have a lot of hope going forward.

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Absolutely.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Another question that's kind of similar to this is: What message would you share with donors and supporters about the importance of funding glaucoma research?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Research is the only way we're going to end the disease. And so, anything that we can do to accelerate discovery will bring us to a better day of defeating glaucoma.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Perfect. What would you say to someone who has just been diagnosed with glaucoma? And then, kind of an offshoot to that: What would you do differently if you were diagnosed with glaucoma today versus when you were initially diagnosed?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Oh, tough question there, Jimmy. Let me go to the first

half. First, I would say, I would follow your eye provider's recommendations, and it's really important to do because you don't feel anything. You don't often see the changes. And that's a good thing because that plan is helping prevent or slow the progression of the disease, importantly. So, you want to be really diligent with the treatment plan that your eye provider recommends. You want to let your loved ones know that you have glaucoma, and you're getting the drops because it is prevalent in families in the hereditary. And, also, to make sure you keep getting regular eye exams and making sure your loved ones do, as well. Jimmy, your second question, which—could you repeat that one again?

DR. JIMMY LIU: Absolutely. So, what would you do differently if you were diagnosed with glaucoma today versus when you were initially diagnosed?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Well, I have to say, because this happened while I was the President and CEO of BrightFocus, I sort of had an idea of what needed to happen, but, I guess that I would say that I would have adapted some lifestyle changes more rapidly than I did. I'd sleep better. I'd cut down the screen time more because I can see over time how that can wear down your eyes. And then, you just don't feel the same way you once did when you blink and when you operate. But I would say that those would be the things that I probably would have talked about it a little bit more openly. I was so shocked by the diagnosis and the impact of it. I held it in a long time before I shared with people what I was starting to go through, and I would do that differently.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Thanks so much for sharing that. We have a couple of listener questions. So, of course, the major first-line treatment for glaucoma is eye drops; how did you work with your eye care provider to consider eye drops versus other ways to lower pressure for glaucoma that include surgeries and other things like that?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Well, I think part of that is a dialogue with your eye provider. In my case, with other factors, the laser surgery really wasn't the best option. The other reason—and this is Stacy speaking as a person, not as the CEO of BrightFocus—is I've learned enough about how eye treatments evolve that when you take a step with your eyes, you could be precluding yourself from other treatments that may develop in the years to come. So, the drops for me were a more logical beginning step. But as Jimmy indicated, there's a number of clinical trials that are happening and projects that may change this answer in the years to come. But that was really … no two people are the same. So, having that conversation with your eye provider, if you're not sure, go to a second. Go to a glaucoma specialist and make sure that you're comfortable with the style. And I'm somebody who could put up with eye drops in the beginning. I don't like it, but I do it.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Awesome. Thanks so much for sharing that, Stacy. And we also had another listener question. I think it's a little bit of an offshoot of it. What would you consider when trying to enroll in a clinical trial? What are those considerations that you would think about if you were to actually enroll in one?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Well, I would hope that it would be something that would be a better treatment than I'm handling today. I would want to know that it was really a promising treatment change. I'm also aware, because of the work we do, that not everyone will qualify for every clinical trial because of other conditions that you may have in order to make sure the trial produces the results that would be clearly beneficial to us. But, so, that's how I would think about it. But I would encourage people to enroll in clinical trials because that's the way we get solved. And there are many people, those of you that have friends that may have had breast cancer many years ago, some of those treatments saved a lot of women because of the clinical trials and the new treatments that they provided. So, obviously, being invested in support of the research community, clinical trials are really important part of improving the treatments and ending or preventing these diseases.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Absolutely, Stacy. Well, I totally echo your comments. And also, for people who are on the call, our Glaucoma Chats do a great job with going over new clinical trials and other important information about new upcoming treatments, so please stay tuned if you want to listen to more about any new treatments or clinical trials that come down the line. We have one more listener question, and this individual asked: Have you ever used magnifiers or have done vision rehabilitation training?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: I have not yet done rehabilitation training, but would like to get their magnifiers. Yes. But I find they don't always work. I have one super one—super big one—but that has more, I think, to do with the cataracts of evolution than glaucoma at this stage of life.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Thanks so much for sharing that.

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: I just want to thank everybody who took the time to join us today, Jimmy, because I think getting the word out and giving people confidence about their treatments and their decisions is an important role that BrightFocus can play.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Yeah. So, I just wanted to wrap up, and then I'll carve out some time for you to have a closing remark.

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: Sure.

DR. JIMMY LIU: So, I think that's all the time we have for listener questions today. So, again, thank you so much, Stacy, for sharing your personal experience with us and all that you have done for the glaucoma community and for BrightFocus Foundation. To our listeners, thank you so much for joining our Glaucoma Chat. I sincerely hope you found it helpful. I would also like to mention that BrightFocus Foundation and the American Glaucoma Society's websites have a wealth of information about glaucoma. So, please visit www.BrightFocus.org and www.AmericanGlaucomaSociety.net to learn more. Okay. Stacy, before we close, if you can leave our audience with one message about glaucoma, research, and hope, what would it be?

MS. STACY PAGOS HALLER: I would say research is the key to solving this disease. And I would be remiss if I didn't ask you to continue or start supporting and helping us through the National Glaucoma Research Program at BrightFocus. Thank you for your time and attention.

DR. JIMMY LIU: Awesome. Thank you so much, Stacy, for that take-away message. Our next Glaucoma Chat will be on Wednesday, November 4, 2026. Thanks again for joining us, and this concludes today's Glaucoma Chat.

Useful Resources and Key Terms

BrightFocus Foundation: (800) 437-2423 or visit us at www.BrightFocus.org. Available resources include—

- Glaucoma Chats Archive
- Research funded by National Glaucoma Research
- Overview of Glaucoma
- Treatments for Glaucoma
- Glaucoma Resources
- World-Class Scientific Review Committees

Helpful items mentioned during the Chat include—

- Important tips:
  - Get routine eye exams to monitor your eye health and check for signs of glaucoma so it can be detected and treated early.
  - Follow your eye care professional's treatment plan and recommendations to help slow the progression of the disease.

- Communicate with your family and friends about your diagnosis so they understand your treatment needs. Family members should also consider glaucoma screening, especially if the condition is hereditary.
- Explore additional treatment options and consider consulting a glaucoma specialist.
- Consider participating in a clinical trial to help advance glaucoma research and potentially gain access to emerging therapies.