

# The Vision Spirit

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Justin Yamanuha, MD; Xue Thao Xiong

An 87-year-old Hmong woman returned to my clinic to check on her only good eye  
She had been without vision in her left eye for some time and was losing vision in her right eye

We reviewed the MRI along with her eye scans and tests  
but the answer was still not obvious and a solution seemed to elude us

She told me very frankly, through the Hmong Interpreter, that she went to visit a Shaman  
who entered a trance and connected to the spirit world

The Shaman told her that long ago when she lived far away in Southeast Asia  
that a spirit had taken away her vision and there were no spirits who could help her here

If she were to travel back to Laos (where she was born) or Thailand (where she was a refugee),  
there might be another Shaman who could find a spirit for her there

The patient told me that she could not go back there  
and had accepted the fate the spirit had bestowed upon her

We concluded the visit for the day  
but agreed to meet again soon after I had consulted other Doctors

I had not experienced such an encounter with a patient and a Shaman and a vision spirit  
but there may have been others for whom I never asked or who just never told

While I could not solve this patient's diagnosis or determine the way to make her better  
her simultaneous trust in me and her Shaman was humbling

The encounter gave me a deeper appreciation  
for the role of the spirit world in health and disease for Hmong specifically but people generally

Not every symptom leads to a sign and not every test solves a mystery  
but there is a need to listen and search and always continue to try

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**WMJ**

*WMJ* (ISSN 1098-1861) is published through a collaboration between The Medical College of Wisconsin and The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. The mission of *WMJ* is to provide an opportunity to publish original research, case reports, review articles, and essays about current medical and public health issues.

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