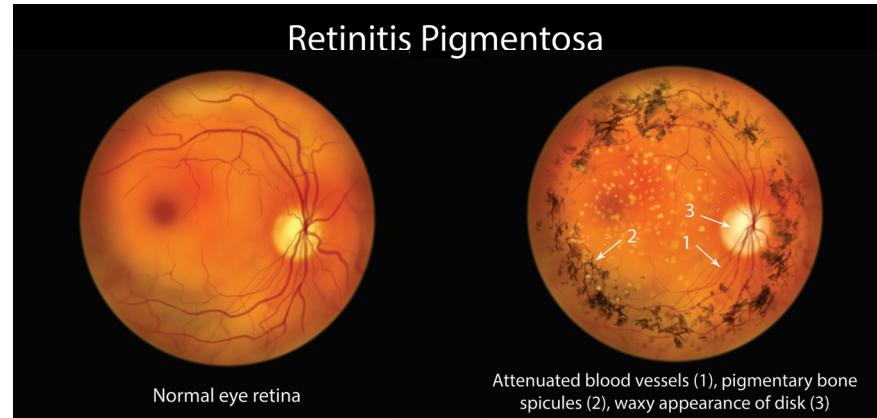


Traffic Lights

BY CHARLOTTE ZHENG

For this issue's instalment of The Culture Section, I was privileged to speak to Moorfield's first prize competition winner Charlotte Zheng. Earlier this year in January, Charlotte wrote a patient reflection poem for the prize competition titled 'Patient as Teacher Symposium: Retinitis Pigmentosa'. Hosted by the Moorfields Education Department in London for the ophthalmic community, Charlotte presented her poem in person to an audience at the Moorfields Academy Meeting in June.

"Living with retinitis pigmentosa can be a scary reality without average sight. My poem *Traffic Lights* reflects the patient's story about her day-to-day life and the isolating feeling and anxiety of simply crossing the roads. This concept was new to me and the patient's story made me realise how we never stop to think about what may come easy to us in seemingly insignificant activities of our day, such as crossing the streets. Reflecting on the patient's shared life experience, I put myself into her shoes



to explore the patient's perception. She commented on how kindness can really go a long way and even the simple act of helping someone to cross the road, can be all the assurance someone needs to feel safer with permanent low vision.

"The poem starts off with imagery reflective of more fearful and scary pursuits with a sense of unfamiliarity and discomfort but progresses through the colours of the

traffic lights to arrive at contrasting imagery reflective of safety, familiarity and beauty. Small acts of kindness can help bring comforting things back into someone's life and therefore, next time, I learnt to actively be more conscious of lending a hand – not just when crossing the road with others, but in many aspects of everyday life. Simple acts can mean so much more for someone who sees through others."

Traffic Lights

Red light

*Broken sentences cut through the converging and diverging crowds of rush hour,
Aromas of steaming coffee rising like patience to traffic: bitter, hot, and rarely sweet,
Cyclists whirr past hurrying shoes, while winds blow past like yesterday's introspection.
A quartet of senses harmonising imagination into reality, but one.
Invisible, peripheral glances circulate movement and disinterest,
Helplessness, apprehension, and unease if they were senses themselves.
Standing at the edge of more than a road but a roaring river,
An endless waterfall,
A falling cliff,
An unknown destination.*

Amber light

*A cacophony of sounds, feelings and sensations, rising, rising.
This all-familiar build-up of tension, anxiety, pressure for this very moment.
The destination mostly different yet always the same,
Nearing in distance but still far, far away.*

Green light

*The building rush of brushing coats, the cadence of boots on cement.
A blur of motion, activity, hustle, determination.

Standing as if frozen in time, isolated without being alone.
Then suddenly. A hand. Warmth on the arm.
Kindness, steadiness, and patience if they were senses themselves.
Standing at the edge of more than a road but a singing river,
A pooling waterfall,
A solid unmoving cliff,
A familiar destination.*



Poetry presentation at Moorfields Academy Meeting in June 2024.

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