



KARYN SHANKS MD

Heart, Hope, Healing

They Did it Brilliantly (Paying Homage to Conventional Medicine)

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | FEBRUARY 14, 2019



I recently had an experience with conventional medicine excellence.

We tend to focus on how conventional medicine lets us down, but it can rise mightily when we are in urgent need.

I was hiking in a rainforest in Maui with my family when I noticed a floater appear in my right eye. Ugh. Annoying! I've gotten these on and off for years. They park themselves in the center of my vision, but with a little time, my brain recognizes them as useless bystanders and my eyesight recovers.

But this time, not only did I have a big glob in my central vision, soon there were tiny black dots all over the visual field of my right eye.

Hmmm, I thought, this is different. But no flashing lights or black curtain dropping (symptoms of retinal detachment we learn about in medical school). So I kept going with our hike, and

the rest of our day, casually observing this phenomenon in my eye.

The next day I woke up not able to see through my right eye save light and dark. I couldn't see the detail on my husband's face. Oh, boy. This can't be good.

The only ophthalmologist on the island (the rest were attending a big eye conference on another island) was able to see me. She diagnosed posterior vitreous detachment (PVD) with hemorrhage (why I couldn't see—there was blood in the way). But no apparent retinal detachment (a very bad thing—damage to the retina means vision loss), though her evaluation was limited by the blood in the way. She recommended I see a retina specialist as soon as I got back to the mainland.

A week later I was seen by two ophthalmologists at the University of Iowa, specialists in problems of the retina.

I learned that being a “high myope” (near-sighted), as the younger of the two doctors referred to me, put me at higher risk for this happening. I asked him if “high” myope was an honor, like “high” priestess. It took him a moment, but I got a bit of a laugh. (We know conventional medicine likes to label people with words hard for most to understand.)

Their thorough exam of my eye and consideration of findings from multiple imaging modalities determined that I did have a very small detachment of my retina, so small I had no vision loss. But real enough to make me vulnerable to having it evolve into something bigger.

After a thoughtful discussion of the facts, we decided to do laser treatment of the spot on my retina right then and there, to “tack” it down, keeping me safe from possible vision loss.

One of the doctors expertly performed the procedure, checking in with me frequently to make sure I was comfortable. Which I was, in spite of the booming electronic male voice emanating from the laser machine announcing each increase in energy amplitude: “Now increasing-to-400 milliamps, now-increasing-to-500-milliamps,” my mind jumping to, “now-increasing-to-a-zillion-milliamps,” as I braced for what was coming next!

In the end, my encounter was exactly what I needed.

These highly trained and experienced specialists focused on my retina. With competence, speed in diagnosis, and ability to integrate findings from the imaging studies with their exam findings, they discovered a potential problem that could lead to loss of vision. They communicated with me with thoroughness and respect, delivered the details of their findings and recommendations in language I could understand, and patiently listened, addressing my concerns and questions.

They were then able to administer super high-tech targeted therapy to remediate the problem. And, most important, they did this with kindness, compassion, and concern for my wellbeing.

I couldn't be more grateful.

They don't know me as a whole person. They can't help me with the myriad other ways I need to heal. But they did exactly what I asked them to with excellence. And I couldn't have done it any other way without them.

This is what we must ask conventional medicine to be. It's what it does brilliantly. They are experts in urgent, catastrophic and highly specialized care.

For the rest of my healing I look to a different medicine, outside the halls of conventional subspecialists.

But I need them both.

Tell me how conventional medicine has helped you heal. We're all so good at telling the horror stories, we forget to focus on what goes well.

Have a Beautiful day!

Karyn

p.s. Healing our lives begins with self-love, the topic of my new e-book: [Love—the Nine Domains of Healing, Part Two](#). Please accept this gift from me to you.

p.p.s. From my Archives:

Co[nventional Western Medicine—There's A Lot to Love](#). 2018.

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Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

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