Condition Name: Hydrocephalus

Description: The term ‘hydrocephalus’ means ‘water on the brain’. Clear fluid is pumped from the blood into the brain and then eventually reabsorbed. If the cavities (called ventricles) of the brain do not drain the fluid adequately, pressure builds up and the ventricles increase. A brain scan will show enlarged ventricles in the brain.

Effects on Vision: The optic nerve is affected as it atrophies or wastes due to the pressure from the fluid. Often this results in the student developing optic atrophy and a cortical visual impairment. This is caused by the damage to the visual cortex by direct pressure or interruption to the blood supply. There is a great variability in the severity of visual processing depending on the degree of brain damage. Another symptom of hydrocephalus is the student may be unable to move their eyes upwards. To compensate they move their entire head to view an object. Often a shunt (or tube) is inserted into the brain to drain the fluid.

Educational implications: Students with hydrocephalus may experience difficulties with their shunt, so headaches, vomiting and visual or behavioural disturbances must be monitored. The student will benefit from materials that are well spaced, bright and uncluttered. The use of large graphics and particular colors such as red and yellow are quite helpful along with simple information and instructions.