

Ten-minute procedure can improve vision

Trio of Montreal doctors have completed more than 40,000 vision-correction procedures

When doctors Mark Cohen, Avi Wallerstein and Pierre Demers met while training as ophthalmologists at McGill University almost 10 years ago, they never could have imagined what would develop out of their friendship.

Now, they have become three of the most experienced and successful laser eye surgeons in North America, having completed more than 40,000 vision-correction procedures since 1998.

They specialize in the Lasik procedure, an office technique in which a surgeon uses a specialized and precise instrument to create a thin flap of tissue on the cornea, or the surface of the eye.

The surgeon then gently lifts the flap to allow an excimer laser to reshape the underlying cornea tissue. The amount of tissue to be removed is determined based on the refractive error of your eye. The refractive error is the amount of correction in glasses or contact lenses required to make you see clearly.

The flap is placed back and within minutes natural forces hold it in place. Within hours, the surface epithelium of the cornea grows over the cut edge of the flap to seal it into position. Lasik can be used to correct nearsightedness (myopia), farsightedness (hyperopia), or astigmatism.

"It's a 10-minute procedure for both eyes," said Dr. Wallerstein. "For anesthesia, all that is required are drops to numb



A patient at Lasik MD in Montreal gets her eyes scanned.

your eyes. There are no needles and it is a painless procedure. When you get up, you walk away and your vision is already better; it's a little foggy, but by the next day you'll see well enough to do most of your things, including driving without glasses."

Dr. Wallerstein says there are three things that have allowed Lasik MD to be successful and build the reputation that is now synonymous with their name.

One of them is a model of affordability. That is a philosophy that they have had since their inception. The price for the procedure starts as low as \$590 per eye, but the price does vary depending on the patient's prescription.

"We want this surgery to be affordable to the everyday person. You need to be able to afford it and if you can save up \$1,000, that makes sense to you," Dr. Wallerstein said.

The second ingredient is state-of-the-art technology. "We have the latest tech-

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nology that's available anywhere in the world. That is one of the things we pride ourselves on. We constantly update that technology and this leads to excellent outcomes."

The third ingredient is the doctor experience. "Our team of doctors include some of the most experienced laser surgeons in the continent.

"That experience leads to a certain quality and level of care that's difficult to surpass," Dr. Wallerstein said.

Not only are the three doctors experienced surgeons, they are well respected university professors in their field.

At 34 years old, Dr. Mark Cohen, a cornea specialist who received the Holmes' gold medal (for the graduate with the highest standing) upon graduation from McGill, also works and instructs at the teaching hospital of the University of Sherbrooke.

Dr. Pierre Demers, 37, is a cornea specialist at the University of Montreal Hospital Centre where he teaches and performs cataract surgery and cornea transplants.

Dr. Avi Wallerstein is a cornea specialist at the McGill University Health Centre, where he also teaches ophthalmologists-in-training. At 36, he has established the



Left to right: Mark Cohen, Pierre Demers and Avi Wallerstein at their Lasik MD clinic in Montreal, one of four clinics owned by the three eye surgeons.

first laser eye surgery teaching curriculum in Canada and is one of only 14 certified C-Lasik instructors in North America.

All these factors combined have allowed Lasik MD to continually grow and expand its patient base, which includes patients from Sweden, Germany, France, England, Switzerland, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong – and even royalty, as a prince of Egypt was a patient of the clinic.

About half the patients, however, are local, with the other half coming from outside Canada, mostly from the northeastern United States. The favourable exchange rate makes the price of the surgery even more attractive to American patients.

Being at the cutting edge of the technology for this procedure allows Lasik MD to provide a reliable and, above all, safe procedure.

"With every procedure we do in medicine, there is a risk," Dr. Wallerstein said. "It's surgery; there's always a statistical risk.

"That being said, this is the safest and most precise procedure in medicine. And it has to be, of course, because it's your eyes that we are talking about."

Dr. Cohen added that there is almost no chance that you will have a loss of vision as a result of this procedure.

"In our group of clinics we performed over 15,000 procedures per year. In the four years we've been in operation we have yet to have a patient that lost significant vision in even one eye.

"Significant loss of vision would be defined as vision that is not correctable to 20/40 or better, the level needed to pass a driving test."

The two main advances in the past year

in the Lasik procedure have been the Zero Compression Keratome and Zyoptix Custom Wavefront Lasik Surgery.

Zyoptix Custom Wavefront Lasik Surgery involves tailoring the excimer laser treatment to very small visual irregularities.

These are called higher order aberrations that are specific to each person. Custom Wavefront Lasik technology takes information from corneal topography maps, and from an instrument called an aberrometer (also called a wavefront analyzer) and feeds it directly into the laser.

"This can potentially allow someone to have better vision than is possible with glasses or contact lenses," Dr. Cohen said.

He also said that the Zero Compression Keratome has allowed them to prevent slow healing which occurred in certain people in the past due to rough cornea surfaces.

Since the doctors started using this technology in the summer of 2001, the incidence of delayed healing is less than one in 1,000.

"We were the first ones in the world to have the privilege to use the technology."

The Lasik MD clinic in Montreal, which is located on the RT level of the IBM tower at 1250 René Lévesque Blvd. W., is one of four clinics owned by the doctors.

The other offices are in Niagara Falls, Ont., and two clinics in the greater Toronto area. Montreal is the largest clinic, with a staff that has grown to more than 30 employees in the past year.

For more information on Lasik MD and corrective eye surgery, you can visit their Web site at www.lasikmd.ca or phone (514) DOC-TORS (362-8677) or toll-free at 1-866-366-2020.