



British News Reports Of LASIK Problems Overstated, Says US Patient Advocacy

UK government group states LASIK failure at more than three times established rates.

For Immediate Release

SACRAMENTO, Calif./EWorldWire/Dec. 7, 2004 --- A U.S. patient advocacy organization says a British government draft report of the popular laser eye surgery LASIK may significantly misrepresent complication rates. British press has quoted a 10% rate of LASIK failure in the U.K.'s National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) report due to be published later this month.

"Our organization has evaluated many medical studies and reviewed thousands of LASIK patient outcomes," stated Glenn Hagele, executive director of the nonprofit Council for Refractive Surgery Quality Assurance (www.USAeyes.org). "About three percent of patients have some sort of unresolved complication at the end of the normal healing period, with less than one-half of one percent having a serious complication that requires extensive maintenance or invasive intervention."

LASIK, which is short for Laser Assisted In-situ Keratomileusis, uses a laser to reshape the cornea of the eye to reduce or eliminate the need for corrective lenses. Approximately 8 million LASIK or similar laser eye surgery procedures have been performed since introduction in the late 1980s. LASIK is the most often performed elective surgery in the world. The U.K.'s National Health System (NHS) has declined to provide British citizens LASIK, based partially upon perceptions of rates of success.

"We are a patient advocacy group," said Hagele. "If complication rates were higher, we would be the first to point it out." It is estimated that there will be 1.2 million laser eye surgeries in the U.S. in 2004, and about 100,000 in the U.K.

A potential source of conflicting information is the definition of failure. "Refractive surgery is often more of a six-month process than a 20-minute miracle", said Hagele, whose organization evaluates and certifies LASIK surgeons in the U.S. and provides patient information through its website. "There are occasions when patients are slightly over or undercorrected and this may require enhancement surgery to 'fine tune' the result. Some patients may have a significant improvement in vision, but not perfection and will require glasses on occasion. Patients may experience temporary dry eye or fluctuation in vision. In all but a relatively small, but important, minority of cases, these issues are resolved with healing or treatment.

"If to be considered a 'success' LASIK must provide instantly perfect vision with no healing time, then somebody has unreasonable expectations. This is surgery, after all, and surgery requires time for healing."

Although the NHS has declined to provide LASIK under its nationalized healthcare program, the procedure is available through private clinics throughout the U.K. "It would be surprising for a federal or private health insurer to provide expensive elective surgery like LASIK. LASIK treats a problem that can normally be corrected with spectacles or contacts, which are significantly less expensive and certainly less invasive than laser eye surgery."

About The Council For Refractive Surgery Quality Assurance

The Council for Refractive Surgery Quality Assurance is a nonprofit patient advocacy organization formed in 1998 to provide objective information about LASIK and similar eye surgery procedures in a patient-friendly format through its www.USAeyes.org website. CRSQA also certifies surgeons who complete its patient outcome evaluation and oversight program.

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