

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Media Contact: Rachel Donihoo
(214) 648-3404
rachel.donihoo@email.swmed.edu

UT SOUTHWESTERN STUDIES EXCIMER LASER FOR TREATING FARSIGHTEDNESS WITH COMBINED ASTIGMATISM

DALLAS – September 28, 1998 – When Richard Segars was growing up, kids would call him "Coke Bottle" -- a cruel reference to the thickness of his eyeglasses. As a teen-ager, he tried contact lenses, but an allergic reaction made them impossible to wear. Although Segars, now a 37-year-old sheriff's deputy, accepted the fact that glasses might always be a part of his permanent uniform, he never gave up hope that one day there would be an alternative.

That hope finally paid off, and Segars, the first patient to undergo a revolutionary laser treatment at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, now has sharp vision to prove it.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has given ophthalmologists at the medical center approval to begin correcting moderate degrees of farsightedness accompanied by astigmatism with an excimer laser. UT Southwestern is one of only seven clinical research sites in the nation and one of the first to begin correcting the condition using this investigational outpatient procedure. Although UT Southwestern ophthalmologists have been using Photorefractive Keratectomy (PRK) laser to correct farsightedness (hyperopia) for several years, this is the first surgery of its kind to also treat astigmatism.

"This has been an incredible experience for me," said Segars. "I've always been behind glass. I assumed that the procedure would improve my vision and put an end to wearing glasses, but I never would've imagined what it feels like to look up at a clock on the wall or the bottom line of an eye chart and, for the first time, see it with my own eyes."

During the procedure -- which is currently being done at Zale Lipshy University Hospital's Laser Center for Vision -- a cool beam of light gently reshapes the surface of the cornea, thereby improving vision. Patients who undergo the procedure may reduce or eliminate their dependence on corrective lenses for distance vision, limiting the need for glasses or contacts. The surgery itself is completed in a matter of seconds, and the healing time generally

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spans less than a week.

Segars said the surgery has given him newfound professional freedom. "I've always felt my safety as a sheriff's deputy was at risk because of my dependence on glasses. If they were ever knocked off of my face during an altercation, I'd be in trouble. Now I feel more relaxed and confident about my eyes than I ever have," he said.

This enthusiasm is typical of the reaction of patients who have undergone excimer laser surgery, said Dr. H. Dwight Cavanagh, vice chairman of ophthalmology at UT Southwestern. "We've seen tremendous results in patients who have been treated with the laser for both farsightedness and nearsightedness, so we're very excited to be a part of this latest study. It's always wonderful when we can employ such incredible technology to give someone a new way of looking at the world," he said.

To qualify for the study, which is sponsored by the VISX Excimer Laser System, patients must have +.50 to +6 diopters of hyperopia with +.50 to +4 diopters of astigmatism. Patients must be healthy with no eye diseases. Contact lens wearers will need to remove their contacts four weeks prior to evaluation for treatment.

Individuals who would like to participate or want more information on the study should call (214) 590-3535 or toll free at 1-888-663-2020. A fee of \$1,600 (reduced from a nonstudy price of \$2,100) will be assessed to cover the laser correction.

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