

A video show

Cataract surgery now routine

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Twenty-five years ago, patients hospitalized for cataract removal spent 10 days recovering in bed, their heads held stationary by sandbags. Vision was partially restored only by donning glasses as thick as Coke bottle bottoms.

At noon last Wednesday, Gabriele Bruno of Allen Park, 60, walked into the Downriver Eye Clinic in Southgate. In a 40-minute operation, Dr. Lawrence Castleman of Farmington Hills utilized ultrasound to replace the clouded lens (cataract) in Bruno's left eye with a tiny artificial lens.

At 3 p.m., Bruno and his wife Mary, who witnessed the operation via videotape in the waiting room, headed home.

Bruno joined the ranks of more than 2,000 outpatients similarly operated on since 1980 by Castleman, who helped develop the technique and introduced it in Michigan.

Castleman's Downriver Eye Clinic is one of the only free-standing facilities in the nation offering complete eye care, treatment and surgery. It is one of six locations in Michigan where the operation is performed.

Castleman, chief of ophthalmology at Lynn Hospital in Lincoln Park, maintains the operation could be commonplace, and will be in the future. Standing in the way, he says, are hospital administrators' needs to fill beds, the threat of lost hospital income, the reluctance of doctors to change a successful system, and the attitudes of insured patients.

WHILE THE TECHNOLOGY used in cataract surgery is new, the techniques date way back.

Cataract removal by suction was known to Arab and Graeco-Roman physicians in the 4th century. And the centuries-old idea of lens implantation was first implemented during World War II by a British ophthalmologist.

By chance, Dr. Harold Ridley observed that fragments of fighter-plane windshields lodged in the eyes of air force pilots caused no inflammation. He began using the material to construct lenses and performed the first lens implants.

BRUNO'S BILL came to \$1,540 for surgery, \$120 for anesthesia, and \$50 in laboratory tests, 100 percent of which Blue Cross will cover.

Castleman estimates each operation performed on an outpatient basis saves health insurers \$2,000 by eliminating hospital costs.

Castleman's practices, however, has made him quite unpopular with his colleagues, "an inevitability when you pioneer anything," he says.

Doctors are upset about it, and are cool to me because their patients are asking to have the same thing done. But just because something is done in a particular way by a hospital doesn't make it the right way.

"For economic reasons, and because of the advantages for patients, this is the way it's going to be done in the future," Castleman said.

The University of Michigan graduate has met a 94-95 percent success rate in restoring vision among his cataract patients who have undergone what he considers "very safe surgery."

"Sometimes the cataract is so thick that there's degeneration of the retina (the light-sensitive lining of the inner eyeball) that we don't know about. Vision is restored to 20-20, 20-30, or 20-40 because the retina is not as healthy as it should be."

"But at least the surgery enables them to read and drive again," he says.

BRUNO, WHO ENTERED a hospital three years ago to have a cataract removed from his right eye, was alert and in good spirits following his operation and debriefing by Castleman.

"I feel really good now, just a little bit imbalanced because I'm wearing this shield over one eye and a big thick lens on the right."

"But the last time had I had it done, I spent two days and two nights the hospital. Here, you come in at 12, and you're out at 3. It's great."

Castleman is seeking to make inroads in cataract prevention as well. As director of a national study, Castle-

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A probe placed behind the iris of the eye emits a high frequency sound wave which destroys the cataract. The dissolved lens is sucked up by the needle.



Dr. Lawrence Castleman says outpatient cataract surgery will be the way of the future.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Mary Bruno relaxes in the waiting room while she watches her husband's eye being operated on by Dr. Lawrence Castleman.



Under a local anesthetic, Gabriel Bruno is operated on while listening to Beethoven's 6th Symphony.

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