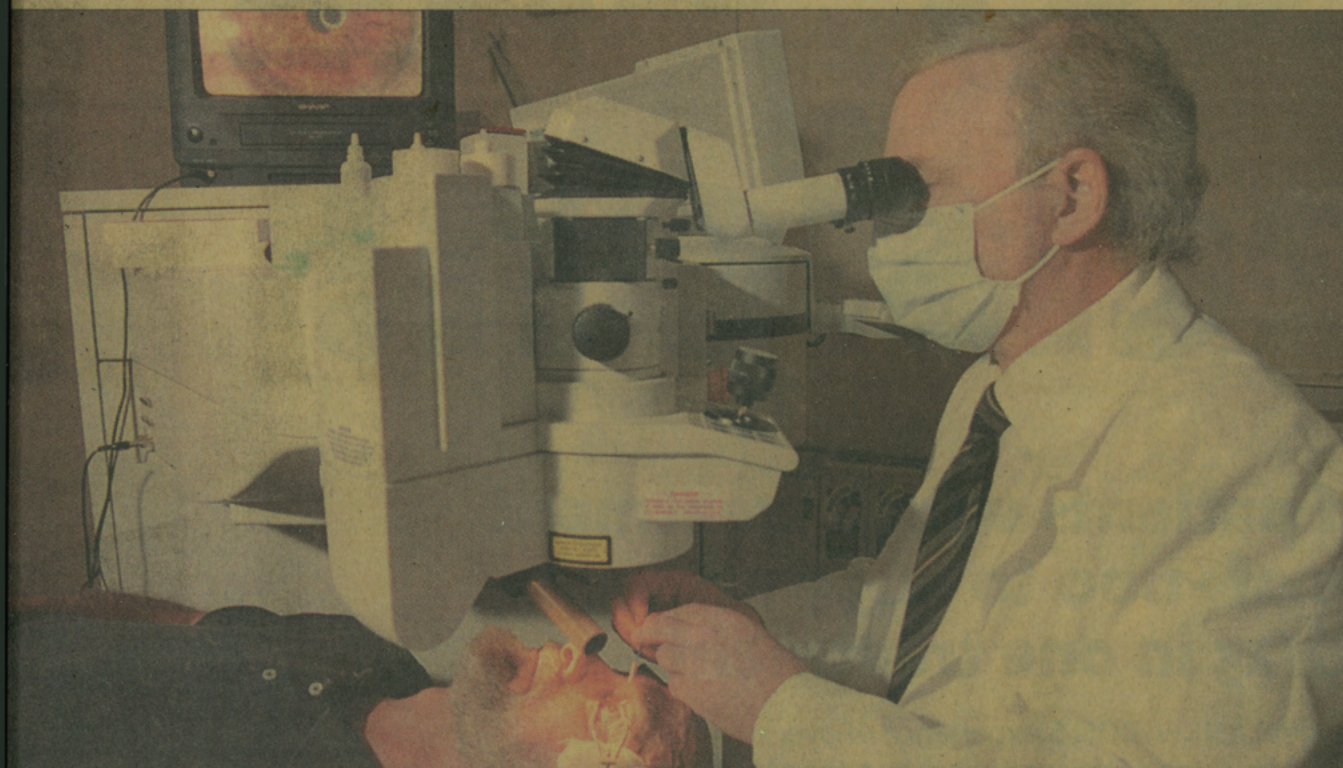


LASER VISION II

An advertising supplement on laser eye surgery



Dr. Sheldon Herzig, of the Herzig Eye Institute in Toronto, operates on a patient using laser eye surgery.

Dispelling the myths

For a generation that thinks of lasers as that ruby red beam of light about to saw James Bond in half from stem to gudgeon, laser eye surgery can give a moment's pause. Questions come naturally to mind. Is it safe? Is there a chance that I will go blind? It is high-tech so it must be expensive. Does it last or do I have to get touched up on a regular basis?

There is a standard range of

surgery. The questions are so common that the Web sites offered by most major clinics all have special sections devoted to dispelling them.

"Safety issues just don't exist," says Dr. Sheldon Herzig of the Herzig Eye Institute of Toronto. "These are now procedures that have been refined and performed on perhaps a million people in North America during the past 10 years."

new procedures such as Custom Lasik, which are still very much in the tryout stage, but Lasik has become perhaps the most common surgical procedure on the continent," adds James Watson, executive vice-president of Lasik Vision Corp. of Vancouver.

So, to start from the beginning, a word of warning. This time from Dr. Harold Stein of the Bochner Eye Institute of Toronto. He cautions those consider-

mind that the procedure is not a commodity, but a surgical procedure.

"There seems to be a myth that this is a simple matter. The problem is that laser corrective vision procedures are sometimes marketed like a can of pop," he says. "This isn't a commodity; this is an invasive surgical procedure. If you had to have any other kind of surgery, you wouldn't naturally choose the cheapest surgeon.

main reason to decide which clinic you will use."

Even Mr. Watson agrees on that point and, at \$699 an eye, his company is among the lowest-priced options on today's scene.

"I have to add, however, that because of our more reasonable approach to pricing, we have become the most experienced place in North America to have the surgery done," he says. "And experience definitely tips the scale when it comes to choosing where to go."

Typical questions include:

■ **Can I go blind from laser surgery?** In a word, no. At least, there has yet to be even close to an incidence of blindness caused through laser eye surgery. Equipment is checked and tested closer than a pre-takeoff checklist for a Boeing 707. The laser only operates for a few seconds and vaporizes the surface of the cornea to the depth of a few human hairs.

■ **Is it painful?** Again, no. There are very few nerve endings in the cornea and their sensitivity is dulled with a topical anaesthetic. There may be some discomfort immediately following the operation. Surgeons say patients compare it with the sensation they get if they've slept with their contact lenses still in their eyes.

■ **Is it permanent?** You bet. The improvement you notice about 12 to 24 hours after the procedure is the way you will be able to see for the rest of your life. While simple ageing may eventually affect your vision, almost all clinics will do touch ups as needed for free.

■ **What about loss of night vision?** This can happen with patients who have larger than normal pupils. The problem arises when the pupils dilate in dim light. If they dilate too far, they may run into the area of the cornea treated by the laser. This can create glare and reduction in the acuity of night vision. As

aware of that side effect, they simply will refuse to operate if your pupils are deemed too large.

■ **Is laser correction suitable for everyone?** Sadly, no. Of the 160 million North Americans estimated to wear glasses or contact lenses, maybe 70% can benefit, makes no difference with certain types of vision problems. It cannot be done if your cornea is too thin or pupils too large. It should not be done in situations where the patient already suffers from a variety of other conditions that affect the eye. The only way to know if you are a suitable candidate is to book an appointment and have an examination.

■ **Is it expensive?** One of the things that admittedly worries many people is the broad range of prices for the same procedure. Each clinic justifies its own approach to pricing in a different way, based on different business models. Expect to pay anywhere from \$699 an eye to \$2,500 an eye.

■ **Can I have one done at a time?** Sure, but think about the problems that might cause. You'll have to come back twice and go through the entire pre- and post-op procedures. Maybe more important, you will have to live with one perfect eye and one that still needs corrective lenses.

■ **How do I choose a clinic?** This is entirely up to you. But you cannot make an informed choice without doing a bit of legwork. Ask friends who have had it done about their suggestions and recommendations. Visit more than one clinic, ask, look and listen. Ask about the specific experience of the surgeon who will handle the procedure. More is more in laser eye surgery. A surgeon who has performed 3,000 procedures is likely to have seen any problem that might pop up and know how to handle it, v. one whose experience numbers in the hundreds.

The bottom line is you have to go with the one that best suits