

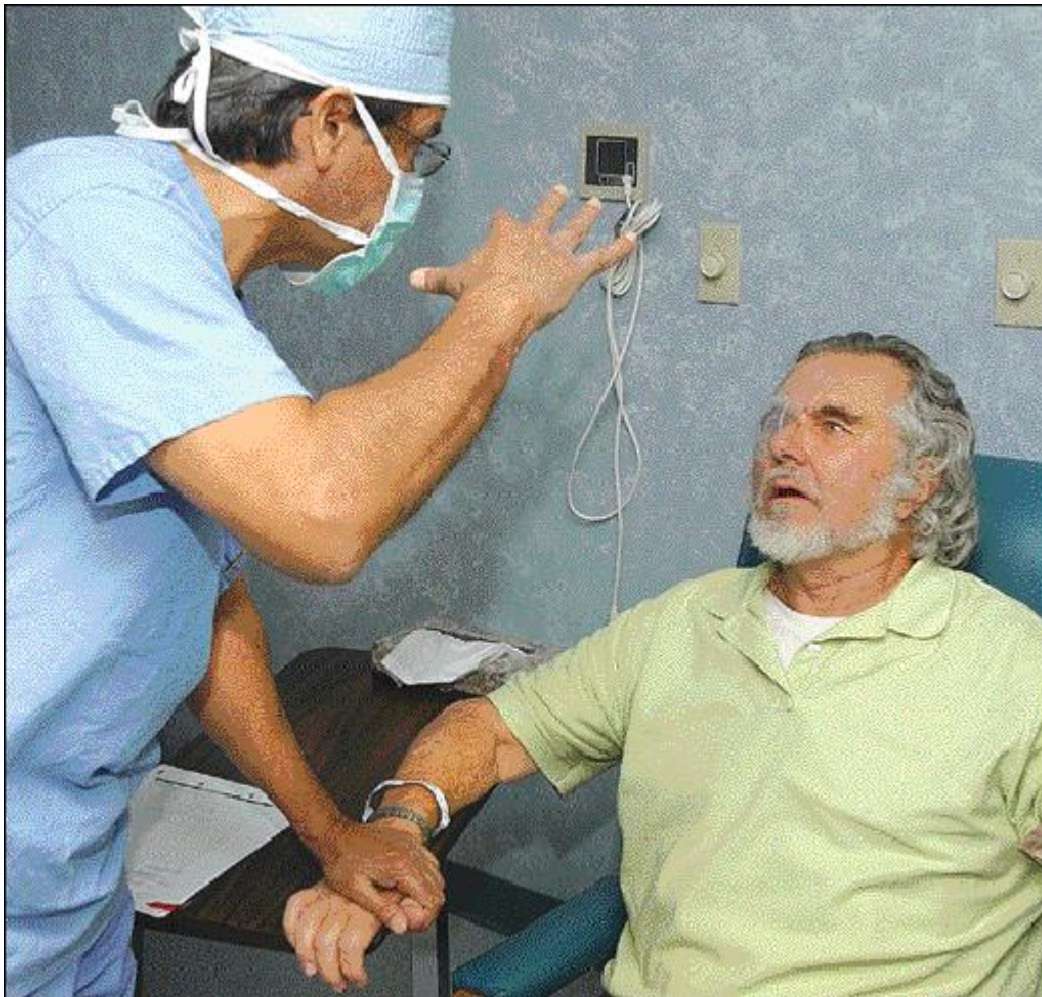
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'It'll be worth it'

Cataract surgery clears vision for regional patients

FOR MORE information on cataracts, see www.ascrs.org -- the American Society of



Cataract and Refractive Surgery; or www.nei.nih.gov -- the National Eye Institute.

Jason DeProspero/The Dominion Post

Dr. V.K. Raju (left), a Morgantown ophthalmologist, talks over the procedure to remove a cataract with patient Bill Seymour following Seymour's second surgery. Seymour, a local photographer and retired university professor, had cataracts removed from both eyes and says he could see better almost immediately.



Submitted Photo

Jackie (left) and Abe Tackett of Grafton, both had surgery to remove cataracts. Despite their ages -- 90 and 102 respectively -- the Tacketts believe the procedure was worth the results.

By Kim Oriole

For The Dominion Post

Dr. V.K. Raju slips a miniscule knife into Bill Seymour's eye and makes two tiny slits.

Then in go thin needles, then a small high-frequency ultrasound and a little suction device -- to break up and remove the cloudy cataract that has been stealing Seymour's vision.

Raju then slips a shiny new clear plastic disc into the middle of Seymour's eye and ties up the outer eye with three tiny stitches using sutures half the width of a human hair.

It happens almost that fast -- less than 30 minutes from start to finish. And it's pain-free. It is modern cataract surgery.

Most Morgantown ophthalmologists do this seemingly simple surgery, helping hundreds of people conquer old age and see better every year.

Seymour, like other patients, is awake for the operation. As soon as it's done, he pipes up: "It (his vision) certainly is a lot whiter. The brown is gone. I've been looking forward to this for 60 years."

In the next few days, Seymour, 66, will see bright and clear like he hasn't in decades. And Seymour's eyes have been crucial to his life's work. He's a professional photographer who taught photojournalism and ethics at WVU for 27 years.

Now retired, he was seeing everything through a muddy brown veil caused by his cataracts. He and Raju decided it was time to fix Seymour's vision, and they removed the cataracts from his left eye Oct. 15 and his right Nov. 5.

"With the exception of having to wear glasses to read, everything's fine," Seymour said a week after his second operation. "It's so much fun to wake up at night and not have to put your glasses on to see the clock. And I can see a lot more of what the camera's actually covering than I could with glasses."

Cataracts are the leading cause of blindness and poor vision among adults in the United States, and cataract surgery is the most common operation done by ophthalmologists, according to the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery.

Cataracts don't hurt, but they affect the vision of 60 percent of all adults over age 60, the society said.

Cataracts are not growths in the eye. They are a degenerative condition where the eye's lens itself becomes cloudy and hard, causing vision to be blurry, cloudy and brown.

A person can live with cataracts for years, but the clouds steal more and more vision as they get worse. Age is the main cause, but cataracts can develop because of other eye diseases or injuries, the society said.

"Cataract is like gray hair," Raju said. "Every one of us would get cataracts if we lived long enough."

Surgery is the only treatment for cataracts, and it is successful in 98 percent of cases, the society said.

Raju does surgery at the Morgantown Surgical Eye Center, in partnership with Monongalia General Hospital. He said the six other ophthalmologists at the center also do cataract surgery. Raju said the surgery has improved greatly in the past 20 years, but "it is probably one of the most sophisticated surgical procedures on the eye."

In the surgery, doctors remove the diseased lens and replace it with a plastic lens implant called an intraocular lens. Patients are under sedation but awake during the surgery, and they can hear and talk to Raju, answering his questions and moving their eye when he asks them. Drops are used to numb the eye.

The risks are small -- bleeding and infection occur occasionally, and the lens can become dislocated, which happens in less than 2 percent of cases and can be fixed with another surgery, he said.

And old age is no barrier to this fix.

Abe Tackett got his vision back this summer at the age of 102.

He and his 90-year-old wife, Janice, had cataract surgery together, and both are seeing better than they have in decades.

Tackett can't communicate very well because he is nearly deaf, but he was happy with his eye surgery.

"I see colors real well, and television," he said.

Then Janice Tackett took over the conversation.

"It's too bad they can't fix ears like they can fix eyes," she said. "We like to read and we had all these magazine subscriptions piling up before we got our eyes fixed," she said. "We like to write letters and get letters. And we like to watch the sports on TV, and we couldn't see the scores."

She said she wore strong prescription glasses, and her husband had to use a magnifying glass to do any reading, which quickly tired him out. So they both jumped at the chance to be able to read again, despite their advanced ages.

They didn't expect the celebrity and notoriety their decision has brought them.

"I guess everybody thinks it was foolish, the way they're carrying on about it," she said.

But she and her husband of 40 years are glad they took the chance to get their sight back.

"If we only live a year, it'll be worth it," Janice Tackett said.

Now, they read their *Newsweek* and golf magazine subscriptions, plus true crime books and biographies. They live alone in their Grafton home, and their daughter next door checks on them and cooks their dinner.

"We get along pretty good," Janice Tackett said. "And we can see just fine. Now, we don't have to fool with that magnifying glass. My eyesight is almost 20/20 with glasses."

Seymour's surgery was equally successful because of the strength of the plastic lenses Raju implanted. Seymour has put down the glasses he wore for 60 years for far-sightedness, and only needs them now for reading and other close work.

Seymour's left eye went from 20/800, which is legally blind, to 20/50. His right eye was never as bad, and it improved to 20/40.

Both Seymour and Janice Tackett agreed that the most amazing part of the cataract surgery was the lack of pain.

"What I couldn't get over was there was no pain involved," Janice Tackett said. "As sensitive as your eye is, you'd think there would be a lot of pain. Not a speck. I was so surprised."

"It was just amazing how easy it was," Seymour agreed. "You can see this orange ball (the magnifying light) doing the surgery, but you don't feel anything. There's absolutely no pain at all. I didn't even have to take an aspirin."

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