

LASER VISION III

An advertising supplement on corrective laser eye surgery

Writing the book on safety

Sheldon Herzig wrote the book on laser eye surgery safety, so to speak. The veteran eye surgeon and co-founder of the Herzig Eye Institute in Toronto is a crusader for safety in laser eye surgery clinics, and, with the Canadian Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery, he drafted the first set of safety guidelines for laser centres across Canada. It can be done in under 10 minutes and for less than the cost of purchasing a new computer, but laser eye surgery is surgery nonetheless. "This is serious business," says Dr. Herzig. Contrary to what people might expect, there is no governing body for laser eye clinics. Of course, anyone doing laser eye surgery must be a surgeon, and is therefore governed by the rules and regulations of each province's College of Physicians and Surgeons. But since no one is watching over the laser eye clinics, Dr. Herzig has made that his business. He played a pivotal role in founding the Canadian Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (CSCRS), which he served as president for two years, and he hopes it will someday become the industry's governing body. The safety guidelines, drafted 10 years ago and distributed by CSCRS, are a start. "If there are problems, it gives the whole industry a black eye," he says. Dr. Herzig has a vested interest in making sure that does not happen. He has been an eye surgeon for a long time before there was laser surgery. In the early 1980s, he

was one of the first doctors in Canada to do outpatient cataract surgery, at North York General Hospital in suburban Toronto. Prior to that, cataract surgery patients required an overnight stay in the hospital. He was introduced to laser eye surgery in 1987, and spent two years researching it before deciding the procedure was safe. In 1990, Dr. Herzig began performing the treatment at a laser eye centre in Toronto, and in 1996 he opened the Herzig Eye Institute with Cherry Tabb. Ms. Tabb, who is the president and CEO of the Herzig Eye Institute, was herself a patient of Dr. Herzig. Then a U.S. businesswoman working in the medical field, she came to him in 1993 for laser eye surgery and saw the business potential of a clinic. The two are now husband-and-wife, and make a formidable team — his deft surgeon's hands combined with her business acumen. The Herzig Eye Institute has a reputation for quality that befits its location in one of the toniest commercial districts in Canada: Bloor Street West in midtown Toronto. One year ago, it backed up that word-of-mouth reputation with an ISO 9002 certification, becoming the first laser eye centre in North America to achieve that standard of quality control. "Basically, it is a third-party validation of our practices," says Ms. Tabb. With all this at stake, Dr. Herzig and Ms. Tabb are concerned about the public's perception of safety in laser eye clinics, especially



Sheldon Herzig and Cherry Tabb at the Herzig Eye Institute: ISO 9002 certification "is a third-party validation of our practices."

during today's price wars. If a centre is cutting corners to make a profit, Dr. Herzig considers that his business, as a safety watchdog. In one incident in California, a clinic admitted to reusing blades in order to cut costs. The safety guidelines Dr. Herzig helped to draft cover everything from proper sterilization procedures to recommended training for surgeons and clinical staff. If proper procedures are followed, the chances of something going wrong in laser eye surgery are

minimal, he says. "Only 1% of patients have minor complications that either go away by themselves or can be easily treated. Any significant risk is reduced by paying attention to safety, not cutting corners, and performing good surgery, he says. Most risks from the procedure can be ruled out with proper patient screening ahead of time, Dr. Herzig adds. For example, about 10% of the population are poor candidates for laser eye surgery because they are at a high risk

for night vision problems. These and other high-risk elements can be identified in the initial consultation, and patients advised not to have the treatment, he says. He cautions anyone considering this treatment to make sure this screening is done by a qualified doctor, not by a nurse or clinic technician. "For every other sophisticated medical procedure, you don't see a nurse to determine if you need surgery," says Ms. Tabb. "Patient selection [for

And, while a surgeon's experience is also key to ensuring safety, Dr. Herzig says that is not necessarily determined by how many procedures he or she does in a day. An individual surgeon performing too many procedures a day cannot possibly give each patient the time and attention required for safe surgery, he notes. Patients also have a role in ensuring a safe, successful treatment. They need to do their research, shop around and ask the hard