

# ALTERNATIVES TO LASIK:

## THE IMPLANTABLE CONTACT LENS



*Dr. Laura L. Harris is a Board Certified, Residency and Fellowship trained Cataract, Corneal and Refractive Surgeon.*

By Laura L. Harris, M.D.

In the world of refractive surgery, there is nothing more disappointing to a high prescription myopic (nearsighted) or hyperopic (farsighted) patient, than to hear that he or she is not a candidate for LASIK (Laser in-Situ-Keratomileusis) eye surgery. LASIK has been in the press for several years as the procedure of choice for most refractive surgeons, however it has limits on managing high degrees of astigmatism and refractive error. New technologies are being developed that will provide more choices for refractive surgeons to offer their patients.

I had the opportunity to experience one of these new technologies first hand. I was chosen as one of eighty ophthalmologists in the U.S. selected by Staar Surgical to participate in a study in the Dominican Republic. Staar Surgical is the company that has developed and manufactured the Implantable Contact Lens (ICL). My training involved conducting research, performing intraocular implantation of the surgery and observing patients after surgery.

The Intraocular Contact Lens (ICL) is a new refractive implantable lens used to treat extremely nearsighted or farsighted patients who may be out of the range for LASIK eye surgery. The FDA (Food and Drug Administration)

has already approved the procedure in Canada. Staar Surgical is currently finishing phase three trials with the FDA, some in the Dominican Republic. Approval in the U.S. is expected within the next six months to one year.

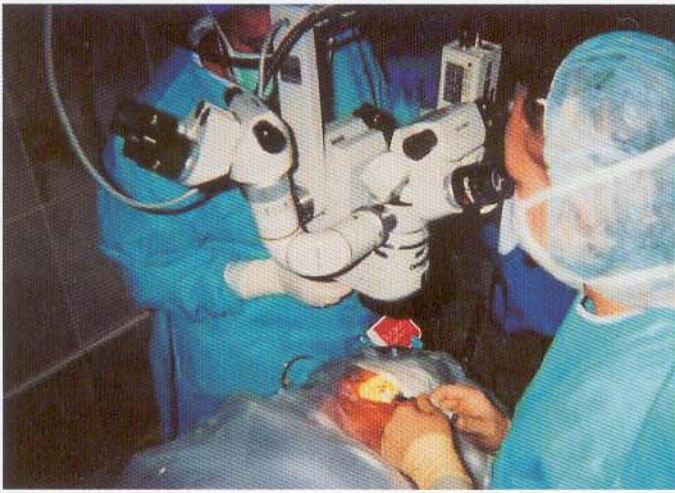
The ICL procedure is performed in a surgical setting requiring a technique that starts similarly to modern state-of-the-art cataract surgery. A clear corneal incision is made followed by injecting material to protect the inside of the eye. The ICL is then injected into the front chamber of the eye and gently tucked under the iris. Other models of implantable intraocular lenses are clipped to the iris or placed in the front chamber of the eye.

My journey to the Dominican Republic began after a flight from Wilmington to Miami, then to Santo Domingo. When I arrived, a team of Ophthalmologists that work at the Elias Santana Center and Centro Laser greeted me. What started as a small charity clinic several years ago has evolved into a world class Ophthalmology center that attracts leading U.S. surgeons and new technologies. This center grew out of a dream of Juan F. Battle, M.D., son of an Ophthalmologist in Santo Domingo, who did his training at the prestigious Bascom Palmer Eye Institute,

University of Miami School of Medicine.

My surgical day in the Dominican Republic started at 6:30 a.m., sharp, with four other surgeons from around the U.S., chosen for the same study. After an introductory breakfast, of course with Dominican coffee, we were escorted to the eye center. The morning was filled with an excellent series of lectures with research outcome data presented to us. We then went to the outpatient clinic to meet our patients who would be undergoing the procedure. At this point, the service and mission this eye center provides to the city of Santo Domingo and the surrounding area struck me. Many of the patients that were present would have no access to high quality eye care and surgery if it were not for the dedication and missionary work of the physicians and clinical staff. I would be volunteering my surgical skills to perform this procedure on three patients. All of the patients had advanced prescriptions, ranging on average from -15 to -23 diopters. In layman's terms, this means they could not even see to find their glasses if they were lost.

It was then my turn to perform three surgical cases. The surgical suites were state-of-the-art, with modern equipment, video teaching capability, high



Dr. Laura L. Harris, Surgical Ophthalmologist, inserting the Implantable Contact Lens (ICL) at time of surgery.



Dr. Laura L. Harris and Dr. Juan Battle, in Santo Domingo with a one day post-operative patient, now no longer wearing glasses.

quality operating microscopes, and marble floors in the operating rooms. The surgeries were monitored closely and done with impeccable attention to detail. We worked until 6 p.m. and then gathered for a dinner with our host physicians and families who follow the tradition in the Dominican Republic of being the consummate hosts.

The next day we were in the clinic again at 6:30 a.m., sharp, for post-operative care. This was an emotionally thrilling time. My patients, who were blind without glasses the day before surgery, were now crying tears of joy and saying in Spanish, "I will throw my glasses away forever." In one day, patients went from seeing less than 20/400 to 20/30 and 20/25!

I was pleased that follow-up post-surgical care on these patients was of the highest level and that there was excellent continuity of care provided for continued research outcome studies.

Being able to help people see is the reason that I studied 14 years of formal training to do cataract, corneal transplantation and refractive surgery.

This trip and training experience expanded my ability and knowledge to do just that. In addition, it was an exceptional opportunity to see a beautiful island and, yes, go to the house where Christopher Columbus lived.

*Dr. Laura L. Harris is a Board Certified, Residency and Fellowship trained Cataract, Corneal and Refractive Surgeon. She did her training at the #1 ranked Wilmer Ophthalmological Institute at Johns Hopkins Hospital. She practices Ophthalmology at Surgical Eye Care, P.A. along with her founding associate, Dr. Alan W. Broxton, Cataract and Refractive Surgery Specialist, and director of the Vision Research Center a division of Broxton Laser Eye Care, also at the same practice. Dr. Broxton previously received the same training in the Dominican Republic in 1999. They will be available to perform the procedure in this area and train other doctors once the implant has final approval. They can both be reached in their Wilmington and Supply offices at 910-796-8600. Web address: [www.broxtonlasereyecare.com](http://www.broxtonlasereyecare.com) ■*

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