

Action News investigates Lasik Vision Institute after complaints

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TAMPA - Lasik surgery is one of the most popular surgical procedures in the country. But every year, tens of thousands of people suffer serious complications.

After a group of Bay area Lasik patients of the same surgery center experienced the same apparent complications, ABC Action News investigator Mike Mason found out the center behind the surgeries has a history of problems.

"It's incredible amounts of pain, it still is hurting," lamented patient Kathy Jasmin.

"Very, very burning as if I'd stuck my face in a bottle of chlorine," added Peter Milovic.

Before May, Peter and Kathy had never met. They were brought together by a similar tale of pain and suffering: both had their Lasik surgeries done on the same day at LVI, the Lasik Vision Institute on Fowler Avenue in Tampa, and they both had major problems.

"I was in a hotel room, my eyes were swollen shut. I could only see shadows, and my fear was that it was permanent," Kathy recalled.

Kathy and Peter both had eye infections. Two days after their initial procedure, they both went back to LVI for yet another surgery. This time their corneas had to be cut open again and the doctor had to scrape away the infection.

"How did it feel when they scraped your eyes?" Mike Mason asked Peter.

"Probably 10 times worse than when they did the original surgery," he replied. "It burned, it hurt, it seemed like they were in a hurry."

Officials at LVI admit they knew several patients were infected that day and they believe the infections were caused by an airborne virus. The company said the surgery room was immediately disinfected and there has not been a problem since.

However, Peter and Kathy are not the only ones complaining. At least four others who had Lasik surgery that day told ABC Action News they also got terrible eye infections.

Each of the patients also has problems with night vision, which makes it nearly impossible to drive at night. When they see a car's headlights, it looks like a blinding supernova; even traffic lights have a halo effect. It makes most of them not even want to get out at night.

LVI discloses, in its patient consent form, that problems with night vision are possible. Each



of the six patients interviewed by Action News signed that form, but none of them ever thought they would end up with eye infections.

"I asked who the president of the company was and I was told, "We cannot give out that information," Kathy complained.

LVI's corporate president, it turns out, is Marco Musa. Action News found him at the company's corporate headquarters in Palm Beach County, and asked him about the half dozen patients infected at the Tampa office.

"All I can tell you is I know that Lasik Vision Institute provides the best service, the most qualified surgeons," he said, denying any knowledge of the patients' complaints. "I am glad I was able to answer all of your questions, and again, all I can say is what's important to the public out there is the fact that the Lasik Vision Institute offers the very best service, the most qualified surgeons, and the overall very lowest price in the entire nation as an overall price."

However, Mike Mason found a history of problems when he investigated LVI and Marco Musa.

In March, the Federal Trade Commission filed a complaint against LVI for making false and unsubstantiated claims about Lasik surgery. LVI's ads claimed Lasik could eliminate the need for reading glasses and bifocals, but the FTC said the company had no reasonable basis to substantiate those claims.

The FTC also said LVI broke the law by requiring patients to pay a \$300 deposit before the company even disclosed the risks of surgery.

Additionally, Mike discovered Musa also owns a company called Eyeglass World, a chain of stores that sell glasses and contact lenses. In 2000, Florida's attorney general accused Eyeglass World of selling outdated, used, and non-sterile contact lenses to customers, and intentionally misquoting prices over the telephone. The company agreed to pay the state \$500,000 to settle the allegations.

"As innocent as we feel that we were in that case, we decided to settle because our attorney advised us that the cost of fighting something like that would be more," Musa said.

Musa maintains his company has done nothing wrong, but patients who were harmed by LVI wonder if Musa could look them in their eyes and still say that.

"If you had it to do over again, would you?" Mike asked Kathy.

"No, absolutely not," she replied.

If you would like to file a complaint against a Lasik surgeon you may call the Department of Health in Tallahassee at 1-850-414-1976, or download a complaint form from [the DOH's Web site](#).

Get a behind-the-scenes look at the Lasik Vision Institute in part two of Mike's report on



Most of Marco Musa's responses were canned advertising slogans.



Eyeglass World settled a case involving reselling used contact lenses and other misdeeds.