



Australian Society of Ophthalmologists

# MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian Society of Ophthalmologists Incorporated ABN 29 454 001 424

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## **60 Second Surgery is still a long way off for most cataract patients**

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists has been urged to provide Australian patients with some necessary background on new eye laser technology which was featured last week on *A Current Affair*, promising "60 second cataract surgery".

ASO President Dr Brad Horsburgh said plenty of discussion had been generated by the television report and, as a result, members of the public needed to be aware the likelihood of them being able to access the '60 second treatment' soon was not high.

The Femtosecond laser was purchased recently by the Sydney-based ophthalmology group, the Vision Eye Institute.

In essence, the laser can remove the need for the treating ophthalmologist to perform the first steps of cataract surgery with hand-held surgical instruments. Rather this part of the procedure may be performed by the laser.

The remaining elements of the surgery –whereby the surgeon manually removes the cloudy lens and inserts an intraocular lens- must still be undertaken manually by the ophthalmologist and takes the usual amount of time for an average cataract procedure.

ASO President Dr Horsburgh said it appeared there had been some confusion generated about what the 60 second treatment actually achieved. He said many people were not aware it is not the 'complete' cataract procedure that takes 60 seconds but rather one small part of the complete cataract procedure.

"There is no doubt this technology is new and therefore very exciting," Dr Horsburgh said.

"But will it be readily available for Australians? The answer at this stage is, unfortunately, no.

"Only four of these lasers exist throughout the world. One of those has now made its home in Sydney and patients are utilising it, but at significantly greater cost than regular cataract surgery," he said.

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The procedure is likely to add around \$850 (per eye) to the overall out-of-pocket cost to cataract patients, a cost-benefit analysis that is yet to be shown. This will be an additional out of pocket cost for patients who have already had to bear the impact of the Government's Budget decision of May 2009 which reduced the cataract rebate to patients.

The ASO said widespread access to any new laser technology was likely to be years away for the majority of Australians. However, it would be important for Government to thoroughly and impartially evaluate the benefits of this technology for patient health and safety when it becomes more widely available, in order to improve access for all Australians.

The ASO said it was also important to highlight for members of the general public the excellent results and standards of safety achieved by current cataract surgery.

"Cataract surgery, as it is performed currently throughout Australia, delivers excellent outcomes for patients and has a very low rate of surgical complications," Dr Horsburgh said.

It is also important for the general public to retain the message that surgery of any type, whether performed using state-of-the-art technology or not, is still reliant upon the qualifications, skills and experience of the medical specialist performing it.

Ends

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