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Eyeball tattoo horror offers up a very simple lesson says ASO

The only person qualified to approach an eye with a needle is a surgically trained eye surgeon, the Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) said today.

The statement comes following a news story out of Canada, where a 24-year-old woman is at risk of losing part of her eye after undergoing an eyeball tattoo.

The woman allowed a tattoo artist to permanently colour the white of one of her eyes by injecting ink into it with a needle.

“Stupidity like this is impossible to understand,” ASO President Dr Peter Sumich said.

“Eye surgeons train for up to 11 years to fully appreciate the delicate nature and surgical anatomy of the eye and how to safely perform intricate surgery on it. No one else is qualified: it’s that simple,” he said.

While the Canadian government moves to ban cosmetic eye modification such as tattooing unless performed by a regulated health professional, the ASO says Australians don’t need legislation to protect them from the dangers; all they need is common sense.

“Don’t do it,” Dr Sumich said simply. “Don’t even think about it.”

The practice of eyeball tattooing is not illegal in Australia, however the ASO does not necessarily suggest legislating against it.

“You cannot legislate against stupidity and that is what eyeball tattooing is,” Dr Sumich said.

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Just some of the risks of eyeball tattooing include:

- perforation of the eye which can lead to blindness (the sclera is less than one millimetre thick)
- retinal detachment (urgent medical condition that may leave the patient blind)
- endophthalmitis (infection inside the eye, that can lead to blindness)
- transmission of blood borne viruses (for example Hepatitis B and C, and HIV) from equipment that is not cleaned properly
- bleeding and infection at the injection sites
- adverse reactions to the ink
- sensitivity to light
- staining of the surrounding tissue due to ink migration.

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