

# Waking up Blind: Reactions and Lessons Learned

BY JOHN C. HAGAN III, MD; KARL G. STONECIPHER, MD;  
AND STEPHEN A. UPDEGRAFF, MD

**Waking up Blind: Lawsuits Over Eye Surgery (Langdon Street Press, 2009) by Tom Harbin, MD, is a story of how a respected eye surgeon caused medical problems for his patients and how Emory University tried to conceal the medical scandal. After having read Waking up Blind, what thoughts, insights, or recommendations can you share with your colleagues?**

## JOHN C. HAGAN III, MD

I know Tom Harbin, MD, as I trained at Emory University. He is an exemplary physician, and I believe his narration of the mess that Dwight Cavanagh, MD, made during his tenure at Emory. My thoughts are that I, and likely other alumni, was misled by the Emory Ophthalmology public relations staff about what was going on in the program during and after the events that the book narrates. My most important conclusion is that Emory University should acknowledge that David Campbell, MD, and Allen Gammon, MD, exhibited proper behavior, commend them, remove the reprimand against Dr. Campbell, and apologize to the public, alumni, and, most importantly, to the injured patients and their families for the University's actions during and after Dr. Cavanagh's chairmanship. This book is a must read for every ophthalmologist.

*"Waking up Blind is a reminder to us all to incorporate checklists into our operative routines."*

— Karl G. Stonecipher, MD

## KARL G. STONECIPHER, MD

*Waking up Blind* is every ophthalmologist's nightmare. Not even Stephen King could have crafted a better scare for the eye surgeon. In the case of a bilateral procedure, refractive surgeons worry about data entry errors, axis of astigmatism errors, and, worst of all, patient chart exchanges because of similar names or information. With unilateral surgery, cataract surgeons worry about implanting the wrong lens, pulling the wrong patient's chart, and, of course, operating on the wrong eye.

*Waking up Blind* is a reminder to us all to incorporate checklists into our operative routines. Just as pilots check their plane before each flight, we must check each patient and the data related to that patient in a stepwise fashion. Without doing so, we will find ourselves a character in a hypothetical novel called *Waking up Broke and Destitute After Being in a Courtroom With Twelve of Our Peers*.

## STEPHEN A. UPDEGRAFF, MD

Parents try to teach their children to avoid "bad" people. *Waking up Blind* is a lesson about steering clear of those with "bad" character. As the book demonstrates, arrogance and a desire for power harmed countless patients and the lives of many well-intentioned professionals whose potential contributions to

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"It was riveting to read about the bravery of the ophthalmologists who believed in and respected their responsibility with every fiber of their existence."

— Stephen A. Updegraff, MD

our field were put on hold. Dr. Harbin's account is a lesson for every aspect of one's life. He demonstrates that, as physicians, we are entrusted with a responsibility like no other. It was riveting to read about the bravery of the ophthalmologists who believed in and respected their responsibility with every fiber of their existence and made sacrifices for it. They are true heroes. Calvin Coolidge said it best: "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent." ■

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