

SMILE: It's What Patients Have Been Waiting For

Increased volume confirms SMILE sparks new interest in laser vision correction.

BY Y. RALPH CHU, MD



Since introducing small incision lenticule extraction (SMILE) with the VisuMax femtosecond laser (ZEISS) in our practice, we've seen a 30% increase in volume of our laser vision correction (LVC) services, not only because SMILE is an excellent procedure but also because more patients are asking for it. We've come to realize that some of our patients have been sitting on the sidelines, so to speak, waiting for a new LVC option. They know about LASIK and surface treatments, but they've been hoping for something new and different. For many patients, SMILE is what they've been waiting for.

SMILE is also bringing a lot of excitement back into our practice in terms of what we can do now for a wider range of patients who desire LVC. That enthusiasm combined with this new technology has been a welcome addition to our practice.

A Wider Pool of Candidates

SMILE is approved to treat myopic sphere from -1.00 D to -10.00 D and cylinder up to -3.00 D, thus expanding the range of patients with whom we can have a conversation about LVC. In my practice, this includes patients who have contact lens intolerance associated with seasonal allergies, as well as patients who were concerned about flap complications with LASIK. These patients may have been somewhat reluctant to proceed with LASIK or surface treatments.

SMILE enables us to have a conversation with patients and their comanaging doctors about this option to help improve their vision and regain their independence and freedom. I think that's why our comanaging doctors like working with patients who have had SMILE. (See sidebar on page 2)

SMILE Basics

SMILE is a minimally invasive refractive procedure during which the surgeon uses a VisuMax femtosecond laser to create a stromal lenticule, which is removed through a small incision. This procedure preserves Bowman's layer and most of the anterior stroma while effectively reshaping the cornea to correct the myopic and astigmatic refractive error.

Importantly, SMILE has been found to be an effective, stable, and safe procedure for treating myopia and myopic astigmatism.¹

A Memorable Case

One of my most memorable cases was our very first patient who had SMILE with astigmatism correction. A young mother in her 30s, the patient had a high degree of myopia and astigmatism. She had looked into LASIK years before, but, in her words, she had "chickened out." Her refraction was -8.00 D with about 2.00 D of astigmatism.

I will never forget this patient's postoperative day 1 visit. She told us, "This morning, when I woke up, my 9-year-old daughter was standing by my bed. She asked, 'Mommy, how are you doing?'" With tears running down her cheeks, the patient continued, "Oh my God! I've never been able to see my daughter's face without glasses or contacts ever in my life."

Everyone in the room—all of the technicians and I—started tearing up when we heard that story. It reminded us of the impact of what we do for our patients. We have helped them regain their freedom, their connection with the world around them, and their independence. Delivering that kind of happiness is why we love SMILE laser vision correction.

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Comanagement Benefits of SMILE

For more than 20 years, we've been working closely with optometrists in our community, and I think one of the reasons why they like SMILE is because it gives their patients a comfortable postoperative course. The safety of the procedure, which is essentially a flapless technique, provides peace of mind not just for the surgeon, but also for the comanaging doctor and the patient.

Patients appreciate knowing their doctor is up to date on the latest technology, particularly when they are considering elective surgery. Often, patients will ask their primary care optometrist his or her opinion on candidacy for refractive surgery and any new technologies. SMILE broadens the discussion for the comanaging doctor.

Vision correction surgery is an exciting time in a patient's life. Sharing the perioperative care and excitement of refractive surgery further solidifies the long-term relationship with these patients for comanaging doctors.

expect that my patients, even those with high degrees of myopia and astigmatism, will achieve at least 20/25 visual acuity as soon as day 1.

In addition, SMILE patients are more comfortable than LASIK patients because the SMILE incision is significantly smaller. When counseling patients, I'm confident when I tell them the SMILE procedure can deliver LASIK-like results.

Conclusion

It's an exciting time in vision correction surgery for both patients and surgeons. The expansion of refractive surgery options has refreshed and broadened our discussions of our patients' surgical opportunities. SMILE is an important addition to the refractive surgery conversation. ■

1. Blum M, Täubig K, Gruhn C, et al. Five-year results of small incision lenticule extraction (ReLEx SMILE). *Br J Ophthalmol*. 2016;100(9):1192-1195.

Postoperative Expectations

One of the biggest myths I've heard about SMILE is that the visual recovery on day 1 can be significantly less than on day 1 post LASIK surgery. On the contrary, I've come to

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