

ARE YOU COVERED?

Some Benefits Plans Cover a Percentage of Laser Vision Correction Costs

By JoAnn Chiasson

It's not necessarily a well-known fact, but many companies and unions offer coverage for workers seeking laser vision correction (LVC).

Just ask Brenda Anderson.

Anderson, 37, who works for an orthodontist as a dental assistant at an office in Kanata, Ont., says she has worn eye glasses since 1990 and "I'd really had enough of them."

them when you ski — they fog up and it's just a whole other level of frustration, so I decided things had to change."

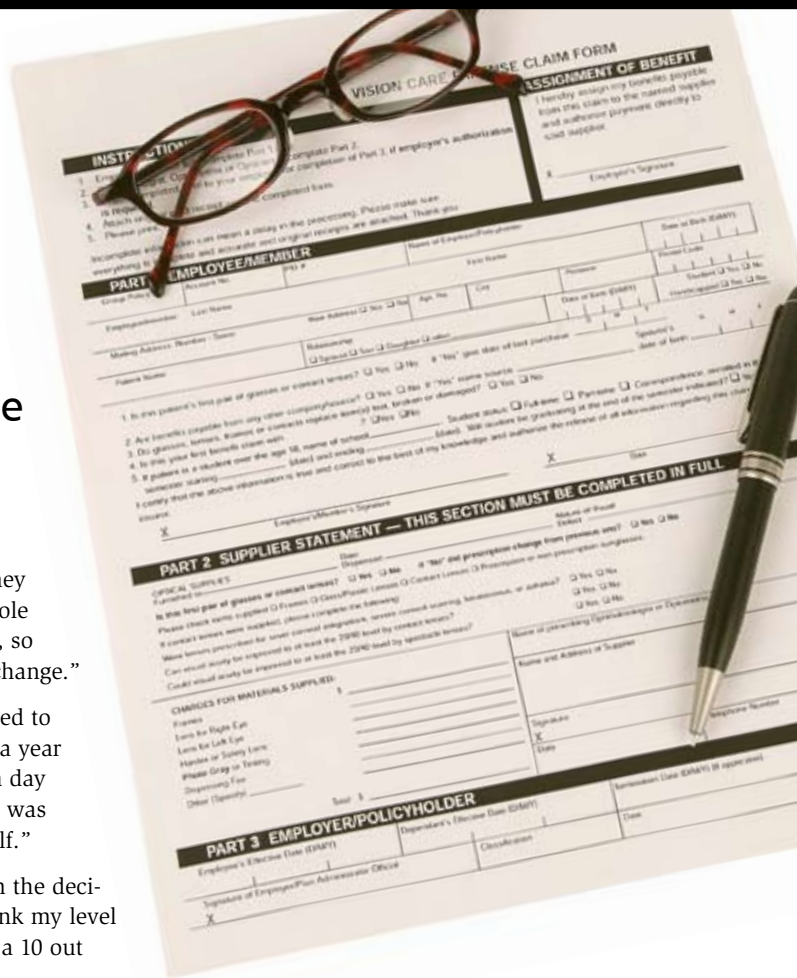
Anderson says she decided to have the LVC procedure a year ago, on January 10th — a day before she turned 37. "It was my birthday gift to myself."

"I've been so happy with the decision. If you ask me to rank my level of satisfaction I'd give it a 10 out of 10."

Anderson is not only happy with her results, she was thrilled to discover — to her surprise — that the health benefits she accesses under her husband's employee benefits plan covered a significant percentage of the cost of the LVC procedure.

"I only needed to have one eye done. When I called [the benefits department] to ask about it, they said they'd check on it and, sure enough, our plan covered up to \$900. I really didn't expect that it would," says Anderson, adding that "the only stipulation was that another vision claim could not be submitted for five years."

"The fact that I could access that coverage, under my husband's plan, certainly helped my decision to go ahead with the procedure," says Anderson, who is mom to two boys, Bradley and Owen, and married to Tom, a Trane employee and member of the Refrigeration Mechanic Workers Union, Local 787.



Brenda Anderson was thrilled to discover that her husband's health benefits plan covered a significant portion of the cost.

"The big thing, for me, was not so much the day to day things, though the business of lying in bed reading with the glasses slipping down your nose did drive me a bit crazy. The big thing for me was that we ski a lot and you have to get into the whole business of prescription sunglasses, wearing

"I'm the only one in the family who needs glasses," says Brenda, "and now I don't need them. It's a very good thing."

Sometimes — as in Anderson's case — getting coverage for laser vision correction depends on efforts made to investigate the scope of the benefits package. Nancy Bast, Patient Services Coordinator with Focus Eye Centre, says many

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ARE YOU COVERED?

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plans do not reference laser vision correction. "But prospective patients realize that a portion [of their benefits dollars] can be put towards LVC — upon further investigation," says Bast.

"It's definitely in a patient's best interests to do a little digging," she says, and "look into the specifics of their insurance coverage."

A sampling of organizations offering LVC coverage in Canada as part of an employee benefits packages includes Bell Canada, which offers \$1,000 toward "elective procedures" via Manulife; the Electrical Safety Authority which earmarks \$3000 through Great West Life; and PC maker Dell, which offers its employees access to a Health Spending Account, funds from which can help staffers rid themselves of glasses. And many unions, including the Ontario United Steel Workers and Local 71 of the Plumbers Union extends coverage for LVC.

Bast says companies are "recognizing the long-term cost savings involved with laser vision correction."

Bryan Jones would tend to agree with her. Jones, 27, is a tradesman who lives and works in Ottawa, is a member of Local 47 of the Sheet and Metal Workers Union, and employee with Flynn Canada Inc., a nationwide roofing company.

Jones says he had "been thinking about getting LVC done for a while" prior to undergoing the procedure back in February.

What was the kicker? The catalyst that made Jones take the leap and have LVC done?

"For me, it was when I heard they added (LVC coverage) it to the policy." Under his policy, Jones is "able to receive coverage of up to \$2000 towards laser vision correction — "a one-time payout only for members."

"I just figured, 'Well, this is as good a chance as any to get it done.' So I bit the bullet and... had the procedure, and it was excellent. Excellent. Really good."

"All my follow-up exams with my eye doctor were good — she said I had 20-15 in one eye and 20-20 in the other. So it worked out 100 percent, I'd say."

Jones was "only slightly apprehensive" about having the procedure. "The doctors and staff were great. Everyone was very calming and supportive which made it easier to decide to do it." Also, some of my friends had already had the corrective procedure and their experiences helped with his decision. "One of my buddies always wore these super-thick glasses. He had terrible vision. One day he showed up and didn't have his glasses on. That impressed me."

Jones was also impressed when he was sent a booklet which contained the latest updates to his insurance policy and health benefits and discovered that the much of the cost of the LVC procedure was covered.

"I guess they figured if they paid \$2,000 as a one-time deal, that would probably save them paying the existing allotment of \$400 a year or every two years — whichever it is — which is what the policy generally allows for glasses and contacts," says Jones. "When you think about it, over the course of an employee's professional lifetime, it's a pretty good investment choice to make on both sides; for the insurer and the employee."

Win/win — it's a formula that usually works. Jones agrees, and says he's never regretted his decision to use his policy to reap the benefits of LVC surgery.

What did he do with his glasses, once he didn't need them?

"To be honest, I smashed them into a million pieces — with my foot," Jones says, with a laugh. "I just couldn't resist. And, to tell you the truth, it felt pretty good." ■

KINGSTON UPDATE

The Quality Conundrum

Take care of people and business takes care of itself

We live in a cynical consumer age — an era when buying everything from a new house to digital camera requires special attention to the warning Buyer Beware.

While individuals must take care, what do businesses need to do to earn — and retain — consumers and consumer confidence?

I think the answer lies in taking to heart the often-used, little-supported notion that quality counts. I can hear you say, "Sure, sure, every business operator says that sort of thing." So let's break down the word 'quality' and look at what it really means in the context of laser vision correction.

At Focus, quality is reflected in the process by which we treat each and every patient. Here in Kingston, it all starts when the patient gets an honest, informed consultation with their surgeon, Dr. John Cheung, MD, FRCS. It then extends through the consultation and into surgery, where we have adopted Wavefront — the precise mapping of the individual's eye that takes place with this technology, known in the U.S. as CustomVue — as our Standard of Care.

The results are two-fold. First, patients approach their procedures with reasonable expectations. Second, in terms of outcomes, many people end up with even better vision than they had before surgery with either glasses or contact lenses (with many achieving an impressive 20/15 level of vision).

Both results stem from a quality surgeon doing quality work in a quality centre. And both results garner Focus a hefty mail-bag full of feedback from real people whose positive experiences with LVC forms the foundation of our thriving 15-year-old business.

Here is a sampling of what I hear from patients:

- "Everything has turned out much better than expected; everyone at Focus has been incredible in their professionalism and care."
- "Thanks Focus Eye Centre for changing my life!"
- "The support and understanding of the Focus staff was outstanding."

Quality as a conundrum? I don't think so. Just be as good as your word, and people will share the good news.

Sincerely,
Michelle Owen
Manager, Focus Eye Centre
Kingston



Does your corporate health and benefits package have
vision?



Then bring your world into *focus*

At Focus Eye Centre our surgeons use the most advanced technology and techniques in laser vision correction, including **Wavefront** — proven technology that delivers outstanding results.

Many health benefits plans cover all or a portion of the cost of LVC. Ask about it today.

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(613) 724-3937 or 1-800-IN-FOCUS

KINGSTON:
Hotel Dieu Hospital
166 Brock St., Suite 325
1-877-460-6029



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Private Eyes



Seeing is believing: actual patient eyes before and after Eyelid Rejuvenation

Eyelid Rejuvenation (Blepharoplasty) has caught on in Ottawa, where Everest SurgiCentre diligently educates its patient population. Here are the Bleph basics...

By Jane Doucet

Blepharoplasty aims to improve the appearance or function of the eyelid. Focus Eye Centre, through its affiliate Everest SurgiCentre, began offering this procedure, which is performed by oculoplastic surgeon Dr. Kevin Smith, to its clients in January 2007.

While some people choose to have eyelid surgery to correct problems that are a result of aging, others have inherited traits such as bags under their eyes that cause them to seek treatment at a younger age. "In my experience, more women than men come in to have this surgery done," says Francine DesRosiers, the clinical manager of Everest SurgiCentre and a registered nurse who has been working in the field of ophthalmology for more than a decade. "The trend over the past five to 10 years has been that younger men and women have been having the surgery, but we have had patients of all ages."

Blepharoplasty removes fat and excess skin from the upper and lower eyelids. The goal is to correct dropping upper lids and puffy bags below the eyes. The results are two-fold: eliminating features that may make someone look older or tired and improving vision. "I've seen older patients come in holding their eyelids up so they can see," says DesRosiers.

For upper-eyelid surgery, the incision is hidden within the natural fold of the upper

eyelid, and it is through this incision that the excess skin and fat are removed. Because the incision follows the natural contour of the upper eyelid, it will be hidden when it has healed. For lower-eyelid surgery, the incision is usually hidden below the lower lashes. Through this incision, excess skin and fat are removed (fat may be redistributed to improve puffiness or bulges).

The length of surgery varies, depending on how many eyelids are done. "If we only do the upper eyelids, it can take 45 minutes," says DesRosiers, "If we do all four, it can take up to two hours."

In Canada, blepharoplasty has become one of the most sought-after facial plastic surgery procedures (in the United States, it is more

"The goal is to correct dropping upper lids and puffy bags below the eyes."

popular than nose jobs, face lifts, facial implants and forehead lifts). As with any type of surgery, there are possible complications, including double or blurred vision for a few days; temporary swelling at the corner of the eyelids; or a slight asymmetry in healing or some scarring.

The best candidates for blepharoplasty are men and women who are healthy and who have realistic expectations about what the surgery can do to enhance their appearance or vision. A few medical conditions can make the surgery more risky, such as certain thyroid problems, dry eye (lack of sufficient tears) and high blood pressure.

After an initial consultation, if the person is deemed to be a suitable candidate, the surgeon will explain the techniques and the type of anesthesia he will use. The nurse will provide a list of do's and don'ts, as well as instructions on how to prepare for surgery, including guidelines on eating and drinking and taking or avoiding certain vitamins and medications.

The surgery is performed under local anesthesia. When the surgery is done, ice will be applied to prevent any normal post surgery swelling.

The first evening post-surgery, patients should rest quietly with their head elevated. After the procedure, the doctor will remove the sutures in approximately five to seven days. A prescription for a steroid cream will be provided, to be used as directed. It's OK to take acetaminophen for pain but not Aspirin or anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen. "There will be some bruising and swelling," says DesRosiers. "We tell our patients not to go to work or attend social events for a week or two."

Patients should also not wear contact lenses for a week or two. In spite of the restrictions immediately following surgery, the results are well worth it. Says DesRosiers: "The more alert and youthful look that this surgery provides is usually very long lasting."

"The results are two-fold: eliminating features that may make someone look older or tired and improving vision."

Weighty Decisions

Expert advice from a surgeon is the best path to developing reasonable expectations

By David Napier

An old pal of mine makes the same New Year's resolution each and every year: Take more risks. She'll tell you that she is never disappointed with such simple, bold goal-setting.

Contrast this approach with the fact that two factors — fear and price — often hold people back from having a procedure that thousands, indeed millions of people, will say is a wise decision. Such foot-dragging is understandable if somewhat nonsensical; some of the smartest folks I know have practically worn out their shoes on route to finally 'having their eyes done'. Take the case of my dear friend Liz.

Just the other night, I was at Liz's spectacular home in an upscale neighbourhood of Ottawa having dinner with her and her husband. After a delicious plate of pasta and salad, we retreated with our red wine to the living room where the conversation quickly turned to Liz's desire to have laser vision correction.

She had gone through a consultation at Focus and yet she asked again about the surgery and wanted reassurances that she would not be left in worse shape than she is now (juggling a combination of glasses and contacts). "Just so long as I don't go blind," Liz said with a nervous laugh.

Here is a highly-intelligent woman in her early 40s who boasts an Oxford education and the unfathomable experience of being a mother to four young children under the age of seven. For Liz, the hassles of glasses and contact lenses are about as welcome as the bout of the flu that ran through the house last week, and yet she still fears to have her fears allayed. Fair enough. But rationally she knows that LVC works and that no one has ever gone blind from having a good doctor do good work.

So I found myself on familiar ground: namely, the place where prospective patients need to hear about complication rates that are very low, re-treatments that are bald-eagle rare, and a recovery period that gives way to a lifetime of freedom. I ask Liz if she met the surgeon, feels comfortable that Focus will take great care of her, and has been informed that she is a good candidate for Wavefront PRK. 'Yes' all round.

Even as I prop up the pillars of her confidence, I know Liz will do what the vast majority of Canadians do when faced with a medical question: visit the 'Net. The Web is everyman's *Merck Manual*, the medical resource we all

consult when looking for answers about treatments and outcomes.

Statistics from the Pew Internet & American Life Project indicate that 113 million Americans roam the Web for medical information (up from 73 million just five years before, in 2002). In Canada, where data often mirrors that culled from United States, we can crudely, if reasonably, extrapolate that some 10-plus million people visit the Web when they want more info about what ails them or a family member.

A recent headline from a medical journal caught my eye: *World Wide Medicine: When patients surf the Web*. The story explained that the Web is a double-edge scalpel: a rich resource where often the facts are correct, but sometimes the information is tainted by bias or error. Only 15% of the people the Pew Life Project polled said they regularly check the date and source of the information they consult online.

The best source of medical info is still doctors and nurses which is why at Focus every patient meets with their surgeon and enjoys the candor and clarity that are the hallmarks of the consultation process. Focus surgeons don't treat eyes so much as they treat people. And the goal is always to help ordinary people get extraordinary vision.

The Eyes Have It

New research aims to help players focus on the key role of vision

(New York) — For most of us subprofessionals, the chief advantage of great vision in golf would seem to be finding lost balls in the woods. Distance markers and laser range finders take the visual guesswork out of judging approach shots, and up on the green, who but Mr. Magoo can't see the hole?

But almost everything I thought I knew about this subject turns out to be wrong. Superior vision is a huge advantage in golf, especially when it comes to putting. Many of the world's best players, including Tiger Woods and seven other PGA Tour winners this year (Vijay Singh, Fred Funk and Masters Champion Zach Johnson among them) have had Lasik surgery to correct their eyesight to Top Gun sharpness, usually 20-15 or better. Golf apparently plays better in high definition.

Source: The Wall Street Journal online
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB119343702545973380.html>

There will always be those of us for whom the act of hiring an excellent professional to do important work remains an agonizing experience, held back as we are by fear or price — or both.

That was the case with Liz. But now she is two months post-op, and enjoying wonderful vision and a busy life free of glasses and contacts. ■

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