

## EyeMax Pro intraocular lens implant provided by services of the London Eye Hospital

This article appeared in the Sunday Mail on 15 April. It does reflect the feedback I have had from patients and their experiences. One needs to be most cautious in this area.

### Would YOU pay £15,000 for a 'miracle' eye implant that might not make a blind bit of difference? EastEnders star insists surgery saved her sight

- EastEnders actress June Brown said she was saved from blindness after surgery
  - The 90-year-old soap actress revealed that she underwent 'miracle eye surgery'
  - But an investigation found the procedure left some with little or no improvement
- By [Jo Macfarlane for The Mail on Sunday](#)  
PUBLISHED: 22:24, 15 April 2017 | UPDATED: 00:48, 16 April 2017
- 

It was, it seemed, astonishingly good news: EastEnders actress June Brown had been saved from blindness thanks to 'miracle eye surgery'. The 90-year-old, who plays Dot Cotton, recently voted Britain's best-loved soap character, revealed in a front-page newspaper report that, thanks to a 60-second implant procedure, 'I can see people's faces and recognise my children again. I can read again'.

It will no doubt have given hope to the millions of Britons who, like June, suffer from age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which robs sufferers of their vision.

But a Mail on Sunday investigation has uncovered evidence that the heavily promoted procedure, which involves an artificial lens being inserted into the eye, left scores of elderly patients with little or no improvement in their sight and significantly out of pocket after paying up to £25,000 for the treatment, which is not available on the NHS.

Although June's operation was an apparent success, and hundreds of patients have reported positive results, experts have expressed serious concerns about the procedure, pioneered by ophthalmologist Bobby Qureshi at his Harley Street clinic, the London Eye Hospital (LEH).



- EastEnders actress June Brown (pictured) revealed that she had been saved from blindness thanks to 'miracle eye surgery'  
  
Leading vision charity The Macular Society is now warning patients to speak to their NHS specialist before signing up for the procedure after dozens contacted them with complaints.  
  
Other shocking findings uncovered by this newspaper include:
  - Patients claiming they were treated like 'guinea pigs' after thousands were given the lens implants which are still said by experts to be experimental;
  - Leading NHS eye doctors raised concern over the ethical practices at the clinic and 'hard-sell' tactics targeting vulnerable, elderly and partially sighted patients;

- Furious patients – most in their 70s and 80s – complaining the treatment left them with no improvement in their vision or of poor care;
- Patients claiming they were not adequately warned of the risks that it might not work, or that they could need glasses after the operation;
- Complaints on social media from patients and their families furious to have paid up-front then left to wait months for surgery, with one saying they eventually needed a 'white stick'.

Few could be less satisfied with the outcome of the procedure than Malcolm Marrett, 67, from Exmouth, Devon, who now needs three different pairs of glasses after paying £15,000 to the London Eye Hospital in May last year.

## SHARE THIS ARTICLE

Share

He said: 'I'm furious. It was like being mugged. The anger and frustration has had a massive effect on my health. I really thought the surgery would buy me more time before my vision slipped away.'

AMD affects about four million people and occurs when the macula – the part of the eye responsible for central vision – deteriorates.

There is no cure, and the lenses developed by Mr Qureshi are designed to delay the progression of the disease by magnifying the vision and redirecting light rays to healthier parts of the macula. The first, iolAMD, which used two lenses, was introduced in 2014 at a cost of £6,000 per eye, and the second, EyeMax Mono, which used a single, curved lens, appeared the following year for £9,000 per eye.

Both involve a ten-minute procedure under local anaesthetic at the clinic's upmarket address. They have been so popular that the latest accounts filed for the hospital show shareholder funds of £124 million while London Eye Hospital Pharma, which owns the lens technology, has assets of nearly £1 billion.

But patients we have spoken to have described conditions inside the clinic, with elderly and infirm patients waiting for hours in packed waiting rooms where there was 'standing room only'. During an initial £350 consultation, which includes an eye test and then a meeting with Mr Qureshi, which some report lasted just ten minutes, all were told the lenses could improve their vision by up to 30 per cent. None recall being told of any risks, or that it might not work. Several claim they felt pressured into making the

decision to go ahead immediately, and were met by a man with a credit-card machine outside the consulting room door.



- Experts have expressed serious concerns about the procedure, pioneered by ophthalmologist Bobby Qureshi (pictured) at his Harley Street clinic

One patient, who did not want to be named, said: 'It was all too rushed. We should have come home and thought about it. People have been used as guinea pigs. He [Qureshi] must have made millions.'

Mr Qureshi behaved 'like a double-glazing salesman', according to Mr Marrett, who was promised a 'special introductory rate' for the EyeMax Mono lens if he signed up for

surgery on the same day. After parting with their cash, patients interviewed by the MoS report calling the clinic dozens of times and waiting six months for a surgical appointment. But the problems really began after the operations.

Patients claim their vision was unimproved after the procedure, and that their complaints were largely dismissed by the clinic. Most never saw Mr Qureshi again.

As their AMD progresses, some can no longer drive or read, while others struggle to recognise faces. All feel they have seen no benefit as a result of the costly procedure. Most patients say repeated calls to the clinic were not returned.

In several cases, the clinic agreed to replace iolAMD lenses with EyeMax Mono – the same implant June Brown had, as reported the Sunday Express – but when it did not work, most patients we spoke to were told by the clinic their AMD had worsened, rather than that the procedure had failed. This newspaper understands that, in some other cases, patients signed confidentiality agreements with the clinic in exchange for compensation or additional treatment.

Louisa Codd, 70, from Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, paid £15,000 for EyeMax lenses in March 2016, hoping for more independence and to read again.

So when Mr Qureshi told her he could improve her vision by 30 per cent, she agreed without hesitation.



- June Brown plays Dot Cotton and was recently voted Britain's best-loved soap character

Neither she nor her husband, retired finance director David, 78, recall being told of any risk that it might not work. She had the operation that September but has been left with 'hazy' vision and is now more reliant on her husband than ever. An LEH optometrist has told her: 'Your AMD is so far advanced there was never any possibility of reading a book or newspaper.'

Mr Qureshi has claimed repeatedly that 96 per cent of patients who have the EyeMax procedure experience 'improvements in vision'. During follow-up consultations, patients claim other doctors at the clinic acknowledged the failure rate for EyeMax was 'one in 20' and that they 'didn't know why'.

The London Eye Hospital insists all patients are made aware of the risks and are given paperwork which states this clearly at several key points before surgery takes place, including by post to their home address.

The consent form, signed by patients before surgery, says 'the results of surgery cannot be guaranteed'. It also says: 'As the eye heals, visual power may be different from what was predicted by preoperative testing. You may need to wear glasses or contact lenses after surgery to obtain your best vision.'

We asked LEH for the data which supports what it claims about its success rate, but the clinic declined to provide it.

Mrs Codd's daughter, Claire, commented: 'In my opinion, they're preying on vulnerable, generally elderly people who are desperate to regain any amount of vision they can because it's such a debilitating thing. If this was happening on the NHS, there would be outcry.'

NHS eye experts are in fact having to deal with the fallout.

One leading NHS ophthalmologist, Winfried Amoaku, a former vice-president of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, said: 'The general view among the medical community is that the case for the lenses used by the London Eye Hospital is not yet proven and that more research is required before they can be used more widely.'

'The only data published on either lens is a pilot study of 12 patients from the clinic given iolAMD, which amounts to proof of concept only, and among those patients, some experienced no vision improvement at all.' Another leading eye specialist said: 'Qureshi is, by all accounts, a very skilled surgeon. But surgery's more than just what you do in the operating room; it's how you practise ethically. This surgery is not a cure. The idea with telescopic lenses is you're just putting that telescope inside the eye. So it's not going to do anything better than massive magnification.'

## 'SUAVE QURESHI GAVE ME HOPE... I BELIEVED HIM'

---

CASE ONE:

Joe Guerin, 79, a retired accounts manager from Dublin, was told by specialists at the renowned Massachusetts Eye Hospital in Boston that there was no hope for his failing vision when he visited them in 2012. His AMD was too advanced for even pioneering stem cell treatment.

So he was 'surprised' in August 2015 when Mr Qureshi told him he could improve vision in his good eye by 40 per cent by implanting iolAMD lenses. But after paying £11,000 per eye, and after six visits to the clinic, he feels his vision is no better than before the procedure.

Mr Guerin cannot use his phone or iPad, and relies on voice activation.

He says: 'I fell hook, line and sinker. He was very suave, very convincing. I was full of hope. It has become very debilitating and I'm out of pocket.'



+4

**Astrid Bergmann, 71, (pictured) thought she had found 'heaven' after reading about LEH in a magazine**

CASE TWO:



Danish pensioner Astrid Bergmann, 71, thought she had found 'heaven' after reading about LEH in a magazine.

In spite of her specialist in Copenhagen warning the procedure was 'experimental', she borrowed £22,000 from her retirement savings, flew to London and had iolAMD lenses implanted in October 2015.

Despite Mr Qureshi saying that her vision could improve 'by 30 per cent, and possibly more' based on the 500 implants he said he had already carried out, her vision has continued to deteriorate.

She says: 'I can't see, I can't read. I need my husband's help to do anything. It's really bad.'

In December 2015, Mr Qureshi offered to exchange the lenses for the newer EyeMax implants. The operation took place five months later, and it still did not work.

Mrs Bergmann is now almost completely blind.

'In the last meeting I was asked, 'Why are you here? We can't help you. But you're welcome to see another doctor elsewhere.' I am not rich. We may have to take out a second mortgage on our home.'

#### CASE THREE:

Retired psychiatric nurse Malcolm Marrett was one of the first patients to receive the EyeMax lens, for which he paid £7,500 per eye, a 'special discount' rate for signing up for surgery on the same day, in November 2015.

Mr Marrett, 67, from Exmouth, Devon, had very limited vision in his left eye and deteriorating vision in his right. He now needs glasses 'like never before' – and uses three different strengths just to go to the supermarket.

He says: 'When you think you're going blind, it's absolutely terrifying.'

'I would have paid anything to be able to see but I've spent £15,000, and that's very upsetting. I can't recognise faces. I ignore people I know, I say hello to people I haven't met before. I can't tell you how many sleepless nights I've had over this.'

#### CASE FOUR:

Former Mayor of Westminster Harvey Marshall went to see Mr Qureshi in 2015 and was told he could have '40 per cent better vision' with a lens implant.

Speaking to Radio 4's You And Yours programme last year, Mr Marshall, a chartered surveyor, said he took a 'deep gulp' and paid £25,000 for the operation 'because eyesight is precious'.

But the lens slipped in one eye, and affected his vision in the other.

The hospital admitted it had only one size of lens, which were too small.

Mr Marshall, 76, said the hospital offered him £8,000 compensation 'provided you don't speak to people'. He initially rejected this but when the MoS tried to contact Mr Marshall by email, his wife Hazel replied: 'He is not able to talk to you owing to a confidentiality agreement.'

Mr Qureshi, 47, studied medicine at St Andrews University before finishing his training at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust and Moorfields Eye Hospital in London.

He founded LEH in 2004, and now enjoys a lavish lifestyle in Monaco and the UAE, where, he claims to friends, he mixes with Sir Philip Green. He owns a £1 million flat near Harrods in Knightsbridge and two luxury cars, a Range Rover and a Mercedes, employing two full-time chauffeurs to drive them.

In a 2015 interview, Mr Qureshi admitted the market for his lenses was 'phenomenal' and worth 'billions'. He said his confidence in the procedure allowed him 'to take calculated risks'.

In March 2016, an advert for the clinic was banned by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) over its claims that the lenses could improve vision for 'both wet and dry macular degeneration'. Wet AMD is the name given for rapidly advancing, severe disease. The ASA concluded this was 'not supported by adequate evidence'.

An inspection report by the Care Quality Commission, published last week, revealed a hospital study that found only 54 per cent of patients would recommend it to family and friends. The hospital acknowledged it had to be better at highlighting possible risks, and be 'realistic' about results.

The Macular Society said it was investigating about 50 calls to its helpline from patients raising 'serious matters' relating to their implants or care at LEH. Chief executive Cathy

Yelf said the society 'strongly recommended' all patients spoke to their NHS specialist before making an appointment with the LEH.

The charity also called for all patients to be presented with a tailored written summary of the risks and benefits before giving consent for the operations.

The LEH told The Mail on Sunday it had invested in new systems and training to reduce waiting times and improve customer care. It said that data to be presented at upcoming conferences showed improvement in 96 per cent of a group of 600 patients.

In a statement, it said: 'How much that improvement will be depends on the amount of healthy macula that remains and each individual's characteristics.

'This is all very clearly outlined in the terms and conditions and again in consent forms the patients retain for the entirety of their surgical journey with us. We do not give, and indeed have never given, guarantees.

'In the vast majority of patients, their vision after the procedure, with glasses, is objectively better than it was. We can unequivocally state that all AMD patients are told they will need glasses and, crucially, all are told that the implant cannot halt the progression of their AMD. It can, however, give them more time with the eyesight they have left.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4414330/Would-pay-15-000-miracle-eye-implant.html#ixzz4fvQnx4N9>

Follow us: [@MailOnline on Twitter](#) | [DailyMail on Facebook](#)