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## Malcolm Grow Medical Center Offers Help to Those Eyeing Refractive Surgery

Mike Martin | Air Force District of Washington Public Affairs

August 31, 2010

Tired of being restricted by your glasses? The Warfighter Eye Center, located at Malcolm Grow Medical Center on Andrews Air Force Base, Md., is offering refractive surgery to active duty military members. Qualified candidates can leave their glasses behind in as little as two months.

"You're looking at being scheduled within a month for the pre-op and then, once you're approved, our goal is to have you treated within 30 days after that," said Ms. Bianca Spears, 779th Warfighter Eye Center Clinical manager.



There are several reasons to consider refractive surgery, said Maj. (Dr.) Megan E. McChesney, one of three Comprehensive Ophthalmologist at Malcolm Grow Medical Center. Reduced dependence on glasses and improvement in lifestyle and functionality are the most common reasons people decide to have the operation.

"I think one of the biggest benefits to the force is for our deployed," said Major McChesney. "While wearing eye armor downrange the member can get a lot of visual distortion, so there is an indisputable readiness mission associated with our center."

The eye center offers two refractive surgery options: PRK and LASIK. Surgeons will establish which procedure is right for you

after an in-depth, pre-operation examination. During this exam, they will also determine if you're a candidate for refractive surgery.

"If I don't think you're a good candidate I'm going to tell you you're not a good candidate, because we're looking out for our patient's best interest," said Major McChesney. "We spend a lot of time in our pre-op evaluation to make sure the candidate isn't someone who might have problems after surgery."

Good candidates have stable prescriptions that typically range from positive three to negative eight. Candidates not within this range may still be eligible depending on the individual, and are still encouraged to inquire.

The eye center has treated 153 eyes since May 5, said Ms. Spears. There is a 96 percent success rate of 20/20 or better vision post surgery. Of the four percent who didn't achieve 20/20, there was only a small need for correction as compared to their previous dependence on glasses.

Major McChesney said when patients are asked to describe their pain on a scale from one to 10 post-operation, they usually respond with a one or two. The procedure is about 15 minutes long and the laser portion only takes about 10 to 40 seconds.

The hardest part for most patients is staying calm prior to surgery. "When you come into the laser suite it's important to just stay relaxed" said Major McChesney.

Ms. Spears knows exactly what it's like to be a refractive surgery patient. "From my perspective, from having the surgery, it's one of the best things I have done for myself," she said. "The reward is hard to even explain; it's wonderful the Air Force provides this service for its members."

The surgery is open to all branches of the military. Servicemembers not stationed on Joint Base Andrews are encouraged to take advantage as well. Patients who aren't from the area can get assistance with scheduling base lodging and their doctor will sign over post-procedure check-ups to another doctor in the visiting patient's area of residence.

People come from out of town for several reasons: Location, waiting time, and because the Warfighter Eye Center is the only Air Force eye clinic in the National Capital Region. Candidates traveling from out of town should plan on arriving on Monday for the pre-operation screening and staying until the following Monday.

"They come in for briefing and assessment on Monday, consent on Tuesday, and have surgery on Wednesday," Ms. Spears said.

The first step to applying for the surgery is coming to the information briefing held every Friday at 1 p.m. "If you bring your packet to the briefing and you have everything signed, we can actually schedule you for your pre-op that day," Ms. Spears said. It's recommended that, at minimum, potential candidates bring their prescription to the briefing.

Information and forms can be found online at Andrews' refractive surgery website, <http://airforcemedicine.afms.mil/andrewsrs>, or call 240-857-8306.