



Eye surgeon sued over Lasik work

Woman claims procedure damaged vision

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By Jim McKinnon, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

A jury has been seated and testimony may begin today in a civil lawsuit against an eye surgeon by a former Indiana County woman whose Lasik procedure went badly.

Common Pleas Judge Max Baer, who is presiding, will meet this morning with attorneys before the jury is sworn in and lawyers make their opening statements.

Kashmira Karanjia is suing TLC Laser Centers of Wexford and Dr. Mark Whitten, claiming her eyes were damaged by Lasik surgery, a laser procedure used to correct vision and allow the patient to see without eyeglasses.

Karanjia, 31, had been an elementary school teacher in Tampa, Fla. She said she had to quit her job because of problems after the 10-minute operation.

The suit also claims that Whitten doctored her medical records to indicate, falsely, that she was a good candidate for the procedure.

Although the surgery corrected Karanjia's visual acuity -- she said that she can see close to 20-20 -- it caused severe visual aberrations or side effects of glare and ghosting that are present during the day and worse at night, limiting what she can see.

These are common side effects for people who have had complications with Lasik.

Karanjia, whose father is a physician, has lived in Orlando for seven years. She chose to have the surgery performed locally, in March 1999, after a consultation with her optometrist, Dr. Charles M. Tarnoff of Indiana, Pa.

She said Tarnoff measured her pupils and found them to be 8 mm in diameter. Candidates for Lasik should have pupils no larger than 6 mm, according to the suit.

Karanjia claims that Whitten and Tarnoff should have known that she would suffer complications. She said that Whitten changed her records to indicate that her pupils were within the acceptable range.

Whitten has said he does thousands of Lasik procedures a year. It is a 10-minute outpatient procedure, approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the 1990s.

During the operation, a surgeon cuts a small flap of the cornea and pulls it back to allow a computer-controlled laser to sculpt the eye to correct vision impairments like nearsightedness and farsightedness. The procedure also can correct astigmatism, a misshapen cornea that causes blurred vision near and far. After the operation, the cornea flap is then folded back to heal.

Whitten has said he did the surgery on golfer Tiger Woods and other celebrities, and is considered a national expert in Lasik.

He has been quoted as saying that during an 18-month period he did 11,000 of the procedures.

Staff writer Virginia Linn contributed to this report.

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[Back](#)

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