



Trends-in-Medicine

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by D. Woods

Quick Pulse

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Stephen Snyder, Publisher
2731 N.E. Pinecrest Lakes Blvd.
Jensen Beach, FL 34957
772-334-7409 Fax 772-334-0856
www.trends-in-medicine.com

LASIK UPDATE

As a preview to the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) meeting in Las Vegas this weekend, 12 refractive surgeons were interviewed about trends in refractive surgery.

LASIK procedure outlook

Overall, doctors estimated that, on average, LASIK procedures in October 2006 were flat compared to September 2006. However, this includes one doctor who reported a 100% month-to-month increase. If that doctor is excluded, procedure volume for October was down an average of 10%. Compared to October 2005, procedure volume was down an average of 6%. Comments included:

- *California*: “Our LASIK volume was slow over the summer – about 70% of usual. It picked up in October, and we are very busy – about 20% above average.”
- *Missouri*: “Volume was down 16% in October compared to September, but it was up 6% compared to October 2005.”
- *Michigan*: “Our procedures were down 33% in October (compared to September) and down 50% compared to the same time last year.”

The outlook for the rest of the year – November and December – is for LASIK procedures to be down an average of 3% compared to last year. Three doctors said bookings are down and likely to stay that way, five said bookings are flat, and two said they are improving. Two did not answer. Comments included:

- *Florida*: “November and December are better by probably 20%.”
- *Illinois*: “Our bookings are good, but these are always our best months of the year. I expect the fourth quarter to be about even with last year.”
- *Michigan*: “The rest of the year will be slower – down about 10%.”
- *Minnesota*: “November and December will be up slightly vs. last year, by about 5%.”
- *Missouri*: “Volume will be flat to down 10% compared to 2005.”
- *Midwest*: “Bookings are tracking a little slower than expected for November-December. However, I’m expecting no change from last year for this time period... We’re hoping that people will use up the rest of their flex money before the end of the year by doing refractive surgery, as they have done in the past.”

Asked why the normally busy fourth quarter is seeing sluggish LASIK procedure volume, most sources pointed to the economy, but one source said multifocal IOLs also are having an impact. Comments included:

- *Texas*: “There is an economic slowdown.”
- *Florida*: “The economy.”
- *Missouri*: “Weaker consumer confidence will hurt volume. Higher interest rates hurt consumers with debt. The housing market has a negative effect on consumers. They perceive that their worth is diminished as a result of lower home values.”
- *New York*: “Procedural volume has increased because of greater acceptance of the procedure by the patient population, but it has decreased because of the preference of most hyperopes for a multifocal IOL. The net effect is no significant increase in LASIK procedures.”

Custom ablation

On average, custom ablation accounts for an average of 71% of procedures, and doctors said this is holding fairly steady.

Femtosecond lasers

Three doctors own an IntraLase femtosecond laser, and all three said they use it for nearly 100% of refractive procedures. A Michigan surgeon said, “I use it for 100% of LASIK, and I do LASEK about 10%.” Another source said, “We don’t have a femtosecond laser. It is too expensive, and I can’t pass the cost on to the patient. It’s no value to the patient.” A Midwest doctor said, “We do not use an IntraLase. There is not one at the hospital where we do our surgeries.” No source plans to get a femtosecond laser in the next 12 months.

Multifocal IOLs

Doctors reported that the percentage of refractive surgery patients receiving a multifocal IOL for either cataract surgery or refractive lens exchange has remained relatively flat over the past three to six months, with an average of 4% of refractive patients and 16% of cataract patients getting a multifocal IOL. A New York surgeon said, “Most hyperopes receive a multifocal IOL, and this hasn’t changed in the past year.”

Surgeons said they use a mix of Alcon’s ReStor, Advanced Medical Optic’s ReZoom, and Eyeonics’ Crystalens for refractive and cataract procedures. Five said ReZoom is their preferred multifocal IOL, while two prefer ReStor, and three prefer Crystalens. Two did not specify a preference. All but three sources are doing mix-and-match.

AAO hot topics

Asked what the most exciting thing will be at the upcoming AAO meeting, an Illinois doctor said, “I’m not expecting anything of great significance. There may be new information on glaucoma and macular degeneration, but nothing new with lasers or IOLs that will be surprising.” However, other doctors suggested a number of things worth watching at the meeting:

- DSAEK.
- Presbyopia correction.
- IOLs: acrylic IOLs, phakic IOLs, aspheric IOLs, and Alcon’s new toric IOL.
- Mix-and-match of multifocal IOLs. A Missouri doctor said, “Mixing and matching presbyopic IOLs will be hot...The Alcon speakers will denounce anything but ReStor/ReStor. The other free thinkers will talk about mixing and matching.” A Michigan doctor said, “Any negative comments about multifocal IOL satisfaction would be important.”
- Eyeonics’ new Crystalens.
- Phacoemulsification: torsional phaco and Bausch & Lomb’s new machine.
- Femtosecond lasers.

