

EYE NEWS

FALL 2012



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A Note from Dr. Winthrop

Summer is just a memory and here we all are, racing through fall and into the holiday season. I would like to wish everyone happy, healthy holidays and to thank you all for your continued patronage. I am honored by the trust you place in me. I take my responsibilities to you very seriously, and as always, I am deeply committed to maintaining the highest level of care for you, both on my own behalf and for my staff. I am always thrilled when I run into patients around town and hear, "Thank you, Dr. Winthrop!" combined with handshakes, hugs and kisses. This is a source of tremendous personal and professional satisfaction, and makes it easier to deal with the ongoing struggles all physicians face concerning both arcane government regulations, and insurance company greed and short-sightedness.

For me personally, Betsy and I had a lovely summer in Santa Barbara. This was the first year in many, many years that I didn't take off any time during the summer months and travel. We are all truly blessed to be here. Betsy and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary in October and went on a cruise. Although travel, as we all know, is more difficult post 9-11, it was nice not being with the hoards of people who have to travel according to school schedules.

Sam is now a second year analyst in the financial restructuring division of an investment bank in Los Angeles. I cannot tell you how proud I am of him. The hours he worked were brutal and far longer than I remember working as an intern. In fact, although Sam lives much closer to Santa Barbara than our girls, we saw him the least because of his work schedule. In investment banking it seems they do not distinguish between weekdays and weekends, or day and night! Sam maintained a great attitude with nary a complaint and at year's end received a fantastic performance review.

Mia had another amazing year. Since I last wrote this newsletter, Mia has spent a combined total of 6 months teaching, working and doing research at a school for HIV orphans in the slums of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. She lived at the school in a cinder block, tin roof building with no doors or windows, no hot water, little electricity and sleeping under a mosquito net! She was truly off the grid. The relationships she formed with the children were profound and have changed her as a person. She is so inspiring to me. Her interest continues to be in global

health, but I am doing my best to introduce her to Ophthalmology and the fieldwork it affords. I have taken her into surgery to watch me do some transplant and cataract procedures. Mia is a senior at Dartmouth and plans on taking a gap year before medical school. She and her boyfriend Evan have now been together for three years and he joined her for her second trip to Tanzania.



Our beautiful Rachel will be graduating from boarding school in the big sky country of Montana this December. She has grown to love Montana, and particularly the town of Kalispell, where she lives in an old Victorian house with 8 other girls while attending Flathead Valley Community College, working as a docent at a local history museum, working with "at risk" teens in a community outreach program, and holding down a part-time job at a "boutique" ice cream parlor. Whew! That girl stays busy! After graduation, Rachel is planning a gap year in the greater Boston area, where she will serve as an intern in various local businesses before going on to major in entrepreneurship in college next fall.

With the kids' busy schedules we only managed to get them all home together at the same time for one single day this year. So we called a photographer and updated our family photos. I am really looking forward to seeing new photographs gracing the walls of my office hallways. I spend so much time in dark exam rooms that it really

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Free Screening for LASIK

Are you still not sure if you are ready for LASIK? In our experience family members wait to see who will "go first". Call us to schedule a complimentary screening at 730-9111 for you or your loved one. 📞

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gives me a lift to look at my family as I move from room to room.

Professionally, much of my spare time has been occupied with evolving Medicare and insurance industry reform. As I've written in more detail elsewhere in this newsletter, my office is converting to electronic medical records (EMR). The federal government is mandating it so there is little choice. I just wish the technology matched the mandate. I've looked at a slew of systems, all of which are highly expensive and underperforming, especially for the specialties such as Ophthalmology. In any event, I've chosen a system, and since the new EMR is not compatible with my old practice management/scheduling program, this too was replaced. Then, of course, our computers had to be upgraded to be faster and more powerful. One can argue about the true purpose of centralizing patient data via EMR, but we can only hope that by coordinating patient information among physicians, we will see a more effective and efficient delivery of health care. Changes of this magnitude are unwieldy and take time to show results.

As a result of our changes, you will see a new face in the office. Linda, who has been my excellent medical assistant, will now be helping me with the time demands and data input of EMR, and I have hired a new medical assistant. I must admit that when I hear the government tell me I must do something that is going to make my practice easier, more streamlined, and economical, I know to smile and be prepared to grow my staff. This is called progress.

My LASIK equipment, the Alcon Allegretto Wave Eye-Q excimer laser, continues to give me great satisfaction and fantastic results. After more than 15 years of LASIK surgery, I still believe this machine is the most accurate, safest, fastest and most reliable laser of its kind. And as the "boomer generation" continues to march forward, I find my cataract schedule steadily increasing. For those of you facing this procedure, the options and outcomes are really terrific. The procedure is safe, fast and comfortable, and the developments in premium IOLs make them a great choice for many patients. I am so proud to provide my patients with the best medical services available in the field of Ophthalmology. 🐼

Advanced LASIK Technology

It has been almost three years since I purchased my Allegretto Wave Eye-Q laser. And I have to say, I am still "Wow-ed" by the results my patients are enjoying! Retreatments are extremely rare, and my

LASIK patients experience virtually no nighttime glare or halos, which are the leading side effects reported after procedures with the other LASIK technologies available in Santa Barbara.

The primary difference between my laser and those used by other LASIK surgeons in town is that the Allegretto is the only laser developed specifically for LASIK. The other lasers are adapted for LASIK among a variety of applications. The other major difference is speed. I am a very quick surgeon, and I have found over the years that this ability, to get in and get out, significantly improves the outcome for my patients. The same is true for LASIK: because the Allegretto is seven times faster than its competitor, the patient remains comfortable and anxiety free; there is greater precision and accuracy with the greater speed because the eye tissue has no opportunity for dehydration; and finally, the eye tracker is also faster, so even if you move your eye, your procedure will be accurate and safe.

Best of all, with the Allegretto, many more people are eligible for LASIK than is true with other machines. It treats a wider range of astigmatism, nearsightedness and farsightedness. So if you have been told in the past that you are not a candidate, talk to us about it. With the Allegretto Wave Eye-Q, you may find that you can now get LASIK vision correction after all! 🐼

Electronic Medical Records (EMR)

The biggest change in the past year is our conversion to EMR. This is being mandated by our government and is a huge undertaking. I have been looking at EMR for the past several years and have been uniformly unimpressed by both its enormous cost and inferior design. The various software programs available were designed for a primary medical practice and would not work in a specialty practice such as ophthalmology. At a national eye convention earlier this year, I was having dinner with some friends from my training days and discovered that one colleague had been hired as a national consultant to design ophthalmology EMR. To make a long story short, I signed on.

I wish I could say that this has made the process less arduous, but it has not. My IT expert has had to either upgrade or replace all of our computers as a first step. Our new system only addresses medical records, and not practice management (appointments, billing, etc.) and is not compatible with our existing practice management programs. So... in August we switched

to a new company for practice management and scheduling. My hat is off to my front office personnel – Jen, Linda, Claudia and Charlotte – for their hard work in learning the new system. I must admit I was hiding in the exam rooms with my patients for this.

Unfortunately, I was not so lucky with EMR. I have attended weekly “webinars” for months to learn the new EMR system. One of my early realizations is that the EMR modules are slow, tedious and time consuming. I was concerned that my tie with you would be occupied “filling out field after field” of drop down menus with my head down looking at a computer screen and my back turned. There would be no time to have a conversation let alone answer questions. Not how I have ever practiced and I was not about to go down that road at this point in time. I have prided myself on being the alternative to the “clinic” type of experience. So the best option for me was to hire a new employee as my “scribe”. However, I was not happy with the notion of having another person in the exam room, as they are small enough as they are and I didn’t want to be speaking to the scribe with the patient feeling left out. So the best solution I could come up with is to take some brief notes while I am with you, and then later have my notes transcribed into government-approved “computer speak.”

I have been electronically e-mailing your pharmacy prescriptions for the past few years and this practice will be incorporated into the new system. The computer will also now generate your new eyeglass prescriptions as well. I suspect it would still be easier for me to simply write out these prescriptions but time will tell. Finally, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my bookkeeper Rindi, who took on responsibility for this entire project and who spent countless hours either learning or troubleshooting the system. I think she will be even happier than me to see the whole system up and running. 🎉

Staff Notes

I am so fortunate to have the most competent staff imaginable. Considering the number of patients who flow through our exam rooms on a daily basis, I rely heavily on these talented people to ensure that my practice runs smoothly and efficiently. They never let me down. With the advent of Electronic Medical Records, we recently welcomed a new addition to the office in Kelsey, who is replacing Linda as my medical assistant. Kelsey is a recent graduate of Westmont

College with a B.S. in Psychology, and is currently applying to various graduate programs for her Master’s Degree. Good luck Kelsey and welcome! Linda’s new role will be to transcribe all the data from your exams into a format consistent with the requirements of EMR. This scribe function is critical since it allows me to keep my focus where it needs to be: on you, my patients. Linda is keeping busy outside the office with her teenage daughter Adia, who is a freshman at Cabrillo High in Lompoc and an avid golfer. Jeff, my ophthalmic technician, and his wife Vicki are enjoying being empty nesters. Jeff continues to spend his free time riding his mountain bike on the trails, and coaching Dos Pueblos High School students in this high-speed and thrilling sport. Jen, and her husband Sean, live in Lompoc and frequently commute into town with Linda. They recently celebrated the high school graduation of their daughter Rene, and Jen spends her free time volunteering with the Pug Rescue foundation. When Charlotte is not at work keeping us organized and on track, she keeps very busy with her three daughters and their extra-curricular activities. Aside from dancing, music lessons and gymnastics, they love to camp and spend time together as a family. Claudia continues to do an excellent job managing my very busy surgery schedule, making sure that every patient gets the care and attention that they need. When not at work, she greatly values spending time with her grown son and daughter, who both live close by. And finally, a big shout-out to Rindi, who in October will be celebrating thirty years as my bookkeeper. As the practice has evolved, so has Rindi; her meticulous attention to detail keeps our complex operation moving along smoothly. She recently traveled to Peru with her writing group, where she toured Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley. My deepest thanks to all of these terrific people, with whom I sincerely enjoy spending each and every work day. 🎉





Latisse for Lashes

Latisse remains the most effective product available for growing thicker, longer eyelashes, and we are now seeing much more anecdotal evidence that it greatly aids in the restoration of eyebrows that have suffered from over-tweezing. While there are more products on the market that claim to enhance both lash and brow, none of these products contain the active ingredient found in Latisse. For those of you new to this product, it takes a bit of a time commitment and leap of faith before you start seeing results; but after about 6 weeks, your lashes will be longer and with continued use, they will become thicker and darker. Please be sure to apply your drops with care, avoiding the skin of your eyelid. Do not use the Latisse on your lower lashes. If you start to notice some redness on your upper lid just above your lashes, or on the rim of your lower lid, discontinue use. This is not a harmful side effect, but it will become unsightly with time and diminish the positive benefits of the product. If you are one of the rare users who experiences redness, it will go away when you stop using the product. There is even less likelihood that this side effect will occur if you are using Latisse on your brows. Just paint it on and wait for the regrowth! And remember it is best to use Latisse in the morning 🐼

Generic Drugs

In just the past few years, there have been huge changes in Medicare. One big shift has been in the business model of the pharmaceutical companies, which are the 800-pound gorillas of the system. In the past, the pharmaceutical companies used a model that emphasized education about various products and their uses, and company sales reps did a good job of providing samples of their products with educational updates. Now, it is all about meeting sales quotas. Maybe not universally, but I think most pharmaceutical companies view their “bottom line” as the only priority; the fact that they are providing products that are critical to human health is irrelevant. I understand that all companies need to make profits, but it seems as if an important balance has been lost. Samples are almost impossible to come by and the cost of the “branded” drugs is outrageous.

The pharmaceutical companies hire physicians to speak at local and national meetings. These physicians

are scripted and paid by the companies to make outlandish statements to the effect that if you don't use a certain product you are “outside the standard of care”. This is not only untrue, it is dangerously coercive and threatening.

I understand that it is very expensive to bring drugs to market. But at the same time, the companies do not need to recoup all of their research and development costs in the first year of production. As well, the companies do not acknowledge that a major portion of the basic research is performed at universities with funding provided by the federal government.

I will continue to use generic drugs whenever appropriate. We are lucky in ophthalmology that often the generics are made by the same companies but under their “generic” division. In fact, the largest branded eye drug maker also is the largest generic eye drug maker. So I have not found generic drugs to be a problem. They are generally produced in the United States rather than being imported from outside the country, where quality control could be an issue. 🐼

LASIK after Cataract Surgery

Over the past year, several of my patients who had cataract surgery prior to the introduction of premium intra-ocular lenses (IOLs) have asked me if I could improve their vision without glasses. The answer is a resounding YES! I have performed LASIK on post-cataract patients with great results; these very happy people no longer need to wear glasses. In the earlier days of cataract surgery, when incisions were larger and the machines to calculate the IOL power were not as accurate, many people were left dependent on their glasses because of residual astigmatism and refractive error. Now, with the advances of LASIK and the Allegretto excimer laser, I can eliminate any left over

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Thank You For Your Referrals

Each year we definitely want to recognize and thank you for your referrals. Dr. Winthrop continues to see new patients in his practice of comprehensive Ophthalmology. It is our pledge to give your family and friends the same care you enjoy, whether they are seeking a routine eye exam, surgical treatment, or a second opinion.



I Welcome New Patients

Because I advertise my LASIK practice but not my medical practice (routine eye care, glaucoma, cataract and transplant surgery), patients sometimes think that my practice is only open to surgical patients. This is not true. I welcome all new patients and your kind referrals for their comprehensive ophthalmology needs. I do not limit my practice only to LASIK or surgical ophthalmology. I love my LASIK practice because patients are so pleased with their outcome, but the heart and soul of my medical practice will always be taking care of patients with medical problems of the eye, and routine “well-patient” care to prevent those problems in the first place. I am on most insurance plans except HMO's, although I see a fair number of HMO patients who are unhappy with their care and feel it is worth while to pay out of pocket to see me. 🐼

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nearsightedness, farsightedness, or astigmatism with great accuracy. The reason being that once you have had cataract surgery with an IOL, your eye refraction is stable and does not change over time. LASIK is done in my office and is a safer, faster and easier procedure than cataract surgery. And, there is no age limit; I have performed LASIK on patients in their 90's. Something to think about! 🐼

Cancellation Fees

This is a difficult subject for me to address but is critical for the continued success of my practice. Presently, it takes several months to get a “routine” yearly appointment to see me. This is bad for you and equally bad for me. There is nothing good about that long of a wait. In analyzing what has changed that is causing the back up, I found that there are a large number of either late cancellations or “no shows.” This still occurs even though I have an automated phone system that notifies patients of their appointments. The breaking point came on a Monday morning in August when 5 people called at 9:00 AM and cancelled for that very morning. I understand that emergencies arise, but in the cases to which I refer, it was simply more convenient for the patients to rebook. So my staff had to find new appointment times for them, and it

was too last minute for patients on the cancellation list to come in their place.

As a result, starting with the notification of this newsletter, there will be a \$50 cancellation fee if my office is not given 24 hours advance notice of an appointment cancellation. I have consulted with several other medical and dental offices in town and found this is now a common practice. I am very sorry to have to start his new policy but feel it will help us all. Finally, my thanks to all of you who over the years have been so diligent about keeping your appointments. 🐼

We Invite You to Visit Our WEBSITE

In the course of my day to day schedule, it is not always possible to spend as much time with my patients as I would like, because I really want each of you to understand what is happening with your eye care. This is especially true if you are struggling with a problem or are considering a procedure. So I urge you to take a look at my website: seewinthrop.com. There, you will find answers to many of your questions about general eye anatomy, diseases of the eye, or a surgical procedure you may be contemplating. You can also check out my academic and training history, download registration forms, get directions or determine our office hours. We have also recently updated our infomercial, which can be viewed on our website. 🐼



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Santa Barbara's “Best” Eye Doctor

I am honored that for the fourth year in a row I was voted Best LASIK Surgeon by the Santa Barbara News-Press. (The News-Press changed the category last year and replaced “Best Eye Doctor” with “Best LASIK Surgeon.”) I know it can be a little tedious and time consuming to fill in the ballot so it is especially meaningful to have won knowing the effort that was involved. Thank you. I will continue to endeavor to do my best for each and every one of you. 🐼



Vitamins for Vision Health

As many of you already know, I faithfully take my daily vitamin supplements for vision health. Studies show that vitamin supplementation can reduce the progression of Macular Degeneration by as much as twenty-five percent (25%)! The major suppliers for vision health vitamin formulations are Alcon (“I Caps”) and Bausch and Lomb (“OcuVite”). I alternate between these two formulations. Costco carries OcuVite and a similar product can be purchased at Trader Joe’s. You can do your own homework and decide which brand you prefer, but honestly, I believe they are all essentially the same and I would not recommend that you buy the most expensive. This is an over-the-counter item that supplements your normal daily multi-vitamin. If you decide to add a vision health vitamin to your regimen, check the ingredients on whatever vitamins you already take to ensure that you do not take more than the daily-recommended amount of any one vitamin. If in doubt, check in with your pharmacist 🐼

CATARACT SEMINAR

We are hosting another cataract seminar in November. This year it will be held at our office at 515 E. Micheltorena Street. This will be a good time to gather more information about premium lens implants. If you elect to use a “premium” lens at the time of your cataract surgery, you can correct astigmatism or near, far and intermediate vision at the same time your cataract is removed. In most cases, your dependence on eyeglasses is significantly reduced. Come and listen as Dr. Winthrop explains how quick and easy cataract surgery can be. Light refreshments will be served. Hope you will join us! R.S.V.P. @ 730-9111.

**DATE & TIME:
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