

New outlook for older eyes

Conductive Keratoplasty, which uses radio waves rather than a laser to improve vision, may soon be approved by the FDA as the first procedure specifically designated to treat "aging eyes."

By SUSAN ASCHOFF

Times Staff Writer 12744

BRADENTON

Marcia Detar has worn glasses to improve her closeup vision since she was a child. About 15 years ago, she needed bifocals. But now that she's reached the age when corrective lenses are almost a given, she wants to be rid of hers.

"I'd love to not wear glasses for tennis and golf," she says, holding her hand just above the outer corner of her eye to show the blind spot created by eyeglasses.

Last week, the 47-year-old Ellenton resident became one of the first in the Tampa Bay area to undergo CK surgery, which uses radio waves rather than a laser to improve vision.

CK, or Conductive Keratoplasty, is an alternative to lasik. The procedure has been used for more than a year in the United States, without a lot of fanfare, to treat farsightedness, or hyperopia.

The low profile may soon change.

Within weeks the Food and Drug Administration is expected to approve CK as the first procedure specifically designated to treat presbyopia, or "aging eyes," potentially tapping that vast market of baby boomers unwilling to relinquish their youth.

"No one wants to get old. No one wants to feel old. Presbyopic correction has been the holy grail of vision correction, always," says Glenn Hagele, executive director of the Council for Refractive Surgery Quality Assurance, a California organization that evaluates eye surgeons.

Presbyopia is a reduction in the ability to see near objects without reading glasses or bifocals as we age. Experts debate what causes the change but most say it is due to decreased flexibility in the lens of the eye.

Lasik, performed on almost 1-million Americans annually, can treat farsightedness but generally is not recommended for presbyopia. No matter what procedure a patient needing vision correction selects, he or she will still develop presbyopia, typically between ages 38 and 42. Almost everyone has it to some degree by 50.

Detar's surgeon, Dr. William Soscia of the Eye Associates in Bradenton, says CK is less invasive than lasik and more easily allows blended vision in which acuity at one distance does not preclude it at another.

Soscia has been doing CK about a month, one of a very few in the Tampa Bay area.

"It's a great procedure for great candidates," says Soscia, explaining that he screens patients and accepts about 60 percent of those who want CK. "The only way you know is through an evaluation."

CK is performed on the cornea on the surface



