



Eye surgeon's practice model of success during pandemic

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By Shaun Ryan

As society struggles to find a way forward amidst the ongoing pandemic, a First Coast eye-surgery practice has proven that even COVID-19 can't stop people from seeking – and acquiring – what is most important to them.

It's a success that inspires hope that normalcy – and even prosperity – lie ahead.

Before the coronavirus arrived here in March 2020, Jacksonville-based Gulani Vision Institute was known for its ability to attract patients from the world over. The practice had gained a well-earned reputation for its preeminence in the world of eye care.

In fact, Dr. Arun C. Gulani – who became involved in LASIK (Laser Assisted In-Situ-Keratomileusis) years before its use in the United States and even invented LASIK surgical instruments – literally wrote the book on several groundbreaking procedures. In addition, he has spearheaded new procedures to address various vision-related maladies and offers techniques and innovations unavailable anywhere else.

He is also a world resource for second opinions and complication correction for eye surgeries, Next Generation LASIK and cataract surgery in particular.

But last spring, cases of COVID-19 appeared in the Sunshine State and businesses deemed non-essential were forced to lock down. Gulani had to close briefly, reopening in May 2020.

At the time, he had just finished surgery on one eye of a South African girl who had flown in to seek treatment after being told nothing could be done for her severe astigmatism. She extended her stay here, and when he was able to re-open, Gulani treated the other eye.

"She flew back to South Africa, 20-20," Gulani said.

Since then, people have once again been making appointments with Gulani's practice. The pandemic was not enough to discourage them.

"Patients come from all over the world, literally every day," Gulani said. "What was amazing was how they sustained it."

Patients have been coming from Asia, Australia, the Caribbean, Egypt, Europe, Japan, Poland and all over the United States.

A recent case involved a student from Paris who was suffering from a condition called keratoconus, in which the cornea was malformed. Until recently, the only option for these patients was getting a

transplant, which is a very invasive surgery.

But by using his patented laser corneoplastique procedure, Gulani was able to repair the student's cornea without cuts or blades.

The entire procedure took four minutes per eye.

Another procedure that has been gaining popularity involved the use of human placenta to eliminate yellowish-reddish growths (pterygium and pinguecula, also called "golfer's eyes" and "surfer's eyes") that appear on eyes exposed to a lot of sunlight. The procedure leaves the eyes "sparkling white" again, said Gulani.

In fact, five fashion models from different parts of the world met at Gulani's office recently, all seeking this eye-whitening procedure. The results prompted them to proclaim the practice the "fountain of youth."

Another reason patients seek out Gulani is his cataract spa, the world's first.

Most cataract surgeries are performed in hospitals and surgical centers. But in Gulani's cataract spa, there are no needles or injections. He uses cutting-edge technology with progressive lenses restoring vision without glasses in a procedure that is completed in minutes while soothing music plays. At the end, the patient is able to simply walk out – no gurney needed.

In addition to offering breakthrough treatment, Gulani's approach to the individual and individual needs brings patients to his practice.

Gulani's practice sets the bar in customer service, not only for its architectural and futuristic design but also because, unlike some medical offices where patients can be kept waiting for long periods, he schedules one patient at a time, whether they have flown 40,000 miles or just walked across the street.

Gulani personally sees each patient before, during and after surgery. Using this simple model, the world continues to come to Gulani Vision Institute.

This approach also dovetails with waiting room standards many doctors have had to adopt as a response to COVID-19.

"People are looking at our practice and going, 'This is the correct way to practice,'" Gulani said.

Distance is observed. Masks and shields are in place. And sanitizers are used. All the staff and Gulani himself are vaccinated.

In addition, Gulani takes further precautions to keep everyone healthy. He insists that international patients are tested in their own countries and then tested and quarantined when they get here.

For the community at large, a center of innovation like Gulani Vision Institute, with services in great demand, becomes a source of economic healing because it generates medical tourism.

Patients come to the First Coast, where they spend time and money. This benefits hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions.

In this way, the success of one member of the community contributes to the success of all.

It's a reason Gulani remains positive during this time of COVID.