Questions & Answers

Patient Charges for Intraocular Lenses (IOLs) during Cataract Surgery

What is changing for patients who need intraocular lenses?
As of Monday June 4, 2012, the new standard of care for cataract surgery will be the monofocal foldable intraocular lens. Patients who elect for foldable monofocal lenses will receive the lens free of charge.

Should patients choose a "specialty" non- insured lens, they will have access to those lenses at a standardized provincial price. The prices are reduced from current rates because lenses will be purchased centrally by health authorities though Health Shared Services BC and will be priced at the cost difference between the standard insured lens and the specialty one.

This represents a change for patients, as patients will now purchase non- insured lenses through the health authority- not through their attending ophthalmologist. Health authorities do not profit from the sale of lenses.

When does this change take effect?
The new policy applies to all surgeries on or after **June 4, 2012.** For surgeries occurring after this date, patients who elect for foldable monofocal lenses will receive them free of charge. Patients who choose specialty foldable lenses will purchase them through their health authority.

What is an Intraocular Lens?
Cataract surgery involves removing a cloudy lens from the eye and replacing it with a clear plastic lens to restore vision. These implanted lenses are referred to as intraocular lenses (IOL).

There are two basic types of intraocular: rigid and foldable. Rigid are an older version of the lens; foldable lenses are more updated technology.

The most commonly used type of lens is also monofocal, which is similar to the natural eye lens. However, specialty lenses exist which correct not only cataracts, but also correct certain eye conditions.

How much will patients have to pay?
There are no lens cost to patients who elect for insured foldable monofocal lenses. This represents approximately 90 percent of patients in British Columbia.

What happens if patients choose a non- insured specialty lens after this change? How much will they have to pay?
Patients will be required to pay the cost difference between a monofocal lens and the specialty lens.

This means the patient is NOT paying the full cost of the specialty lens, but only the cost difference between the standard lens and the specialty one.

Plus, bulk purchasing by the health authorities will attempt to lower the price of specialty lenses for patients.

Will specialty lenses become insured?

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No, only the monofocal foldable lens will be funded, since this is what is medically required to correct the cataract.

Specialty lenses are not required for cataract surgery. They are intended to correct vision to replace the need for eyeglasses.

How many people get cataract surgery in B.C.?
In 2010/11, there were 51, 887 cataract surgeries performed in British Columbia.

It is anticipated that approximately 90 per cent of patients will receive the insured monofocal lenses.

Will you reimburse those patients who had to pay for lenses in the past?
No, these changes will be affecting patients in the future- starting June 4, 2012.

Will doctors have other brands available for patients to buy?
Under the new policy, health authorities must purchase and supply all lenses that are used in publicly funded cataract surgeries. This means that doctors will no longer be purchasing or selling foldable lenses directly to patients.

Health Shared Services will purchase all lenses for patients in B.C. and patients who choose specialty lenses will pay the health authority directly rather than the surgeon.

Health Shared Services will work with lens suppliers to ensure patients have access to the best quality products at the best prices.

Who can I speak to if I have questions?

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