Editorial

Refractive Surgery at the Crossroads

Today refractive surgery is performed in countries throughout the world, and the pioneers who introduced these revolutionary procedures have witnessed their widespread proliferation and modification. After a decade of experience in the United States, these procedures have proven to be safe when properly performed. General guidelines have been developed indicating which types of keratoplasty are appropriate for the correction of specific refractive errors. We realize, however, that unqualified acceptance will not be possible until these refractive techniques can be made as accurate as spectacles and contact lenses. Currently a major thrust of our research in refractive surgery is the attempt to obtain such optimum accuracy.

These procedures are controversial because they question established definitions of normal and abnormal, experimental and proven, cosmetic and functional. From its inception in 1981, the International Society of Refractive Keratoplasty has been a leader in the scientific investigation of refractive techniques. We have insisted that they be studied to evaluate their safety, efficacy, and predictability. These studies have served to underscore many unresolved issues:

Can the spread between the desired and the actual postoperative refraction be brought to an acceptable range? Is the standardization of instruments a major factor? Can the manipulation of wound healing through chemical agents lead to greater accuracy? Will non-freeze techniques produce more rapid and accurate visual recovery? Are laser controlled keratotomy incisions superior to those made by gem quality blades? Can normal vision be achieved following laser destruction of Bowman's membrane? Can the cornea tolerate the new intrastromal plastics? Is clear lens extraction and the use of implants a viable treatment for myopia? Can keratotomy reduce hyperopia? Can astigmatic keratotomy be quantified?

Our challenge in the coming decade will be the resolution of these complex issues. And this can only be accomplished with the unrestricted cooperation of individuals and institutions involved in the practice of refractive surgery throughout the world. With its very foundations rooted in the diverse cultures of Japan, Russia, and Colombia, ISRK has been dedicated to the international dissemination of the concepts of refractive surgery. ISRK has actively sponsored multinational dialogue and cooperation and has witnessed unparalleled advances in the field of refractive surgery.

This year marks the beginning of a unique cooperative effort between our organization and the newly formed European Refractive Surgery Society (ERSS).* The ERSS has voted to make the Journal of Refractive Surgery the official journal of their society and has appointed representatives to sit on the Journal's Editorial Advisory Board. As the repository of major papers from the members of both organizations, the Journal of Refractive Surgery will secure its reputation as the premier journal in refractive surgery. In addition, the two organizations have agreed to the joint sponsorship of a refractive surgery satellite symposium, March 16-16, 1990, in Singapore, immediately preceding the International Congress of Ophthalmology.

In the global community in which we live, rapid and unrestricted communication and interaction are essential, providing the intellectual stimulus for problem solving, scientific advancement, and continued, significant progress in refractive surgery. We look forward to both a productive association with the ERSS and to the formation of similar ventures in Latin America and Asia.

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*An editorial by the President of the European Refractive Surgery Society, Dr. Umberto Merlin, will appear in the March/April issue.