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Once legally blind, the Saghir brothers have better than 20-20 vision after procedure

by Charlie Patton



Tareq Saghir was legally blind until he underwent a procedure performed by Jacksonville ophthalmologist Arun Gulani to place a lens under his cornea. Now his vision is better than 20 /20.

Until the last week of February, Tareq Saghir was legally blind.

The 36-year-old father of two, who works as a staff internist at Sacred Heart Hospital in Pensacola, couldn't read the large E on the eye chart without Coke bottle-thick glasses that were specially made

for him in Germany. When he woke in the morning, his wife and children were just a blur to him until he put on those glasses.

He shared the dilemma with his twin brother, Taher Saghir, who also works as an internist at Sacred Heart Hospital. Both suffered from extreme cases of keratoconus, a condition that causes the cornea to thin and become more conical in shape rather than the more normal gradual curve.

Because their corneas are extremely thin, the Saghir brothers, who were born in Jordan but have lived in the U.S. since 1997, were not candidates for Lasik eye surgery, which has become a standard treatment for nearsightedness.

Taher Saghir did some research on the Internet and found a possible solution for the brothers. He found that Jacksonville ophthalmologist Arun Gulani of the Gulani Vision Institute regularly performs a procedure in which he implants a lens in the eye underneath the cornea, correcting even extreme near-sightedness.

It's a technique that Gulani learned in the 1990s from Russian ophthalmologist Svyatoslav "Slava" Fyodorov, who rose to fame in the 1980s as the first physician to use radial keratotomy

to correct nearsightedness and was a pioneer in the use of lens implants. Gulani was later involved in clinical trials in the U.S. of the technique.

The Visian Implantable Collamer Lens was approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration for use in the U.S. in 2005. Gulani said he has done several hundred over the last decade but believes the technique is still underused in America.

In late February, the Saghir brothers came to Jacksonville to undergo procedure.

Taher Saghir made the journey first. Tareq Saghir followed a week later.

Gulani did one eye at a time for each. The implant is made of collamer, a material that can be rolled into a tiny cylinder for insertion into the eye. As the lens is inserted, it

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gently unfolds. By changing the shape of the cornea, the implanted lens dramatically improves vision.

“I’ve gotten amazing results,” Tareq Saghir said.

He no longer wears his glasses and said that his vision is now better than 20 /20.

The procedure was performed using a local anesthetic. Conscious throughout the relatively brief procedure, he said all he felt was a little pressure.

Once “imprisoned” by their flawed vision, the Saghir brothers are now free, Gulani said.