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New glaucoma treatment could provide permanent relief | Bellevue doc practicing the procedure



Dr. Howard Barnebey is a Bellevue ophthalmologist trained to perform the canaloplasty procedure on glaucoma patients.
Submitted

By [JOSHUA ADAM HICKS](#)

Doctors are using a new procedure to treat glaucoma that could have more permanent results than previous methods.

The operation, known as a [canaloplasty](#), involves placing a microcatheter in the eye's main drainage channel to inject a gel-like material that enlarges the passage. The microcatheter is then removed, and a suture is put in place to keep the canal open.

Dr. Howard Barnebey performs canaloplasties at his ophthalmology practice in Bellevue. He compares [the procedure](#) to a sort of microscopic angioplasty.

“The advantage we’ve been seeing is that it gives the patient a quicker recovery,” Barnebey said.

Glaucoma is a condition in which the eye does not drain properly, causing pressure to increase on the optic nerve.

Around 4 million people have disease, and more than 100,000 going blind from it each year. Many doctors call it the “sneak thief of sight” because of the way it can strike without warning or symptoms.

Past treatments have involved medicating the eye with drops, or, when that fails, puncturing a hole to allow drainage – a method that Barnebey considers to be antiquated.

“The procedure really hasn’t changed much in 50 years,” Barnebey said. “We’ve made it better and worked around some of the shortcomings, but it hasn’t really been in keeping with how we’ve evolved with technology.”

Previous methods, including laser surgery, tend to provide temporary relief, as they generally cause scar tissue that disrupts drainage.

Canaloplasty is different because it doesn’t involve a puncture.

Seventy-year-old Ken Lloyd of Port Orchard had a canaloplasty on his right eye, and laser surgery on the left.

The pressure on his left eye came down just 40 percent, while it dropped around 60 percent on the right.

Lloyd's left eye now requires medicated drops and daily massaging, while his right is maintenance free.

"I'm very impressed," he said. "I haven't had any problems whatsoever."

The canaloplasty procedure is relatively new, which means it's not yet clear whether the treatment provides permanent relief.

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