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# Extraordinary Days are the Life of a Gulf Coast Ophthalmologist



Dr. Rainna Bahadur

You go in for a routine eye exam and your eye doctor saves your life.

It doesn't happen every

day. But it can happen *any* day in the life of an ophthalmologist, those medical doctors who look at your health picture – beyond eye charts.

Restoring vision seems miracle enough to most patients, but even more dramatic results can and do happen.

"People don't fully understand what ophthalmologists do. We're physicians and we're surgeons, so we're not only doing normal eye exams. We are treating systemic illnesses," said Rainna Bahadur, M.D., a Biloxi ophthalmologist.

"We aren't simply fitting people for eyeglasses and contact lenses. Everyday procedures can have profound, positive life-changing effects," she said.

A native of Greenwood, Miss., Bahadur sees patients at Eye Associates

of the South's clinics in Biloxi, Gulfport and Ocean Springs. She and partner, Joel Knight, M.D., are among four ophthalmologists in the practice. She also performs surgeries on Wednesdays and is on emergency call one week in four at Biloxi Regional Medical Center.

Bahadur said it's never routine – because no two eyes are alike.

Mary Utsey, 87, of Biloxi, came to Bahadur for help when suddenly blinded in one eye by shingles. Bahadur performed cornea transplant surgery and, now, Utsey sees 20/25 in that eye – almost perfect vision.

Thressa G. Baker, 42, of Gulfport sought correction for "horrible" lifelong vision, extreme dry eye problems and other complications. After a series of treatments and custom cataract lens implants by Bahadur, Baker got rid of her pop-bottle

eyeglasses forever and her dry eyes. For the first time in her life, she sees in the perfect 20/20 range.

Another Biloxi patient, who asked not to be identified for medical reasons, felt like she had "grit" in her eye. She was told by another clinic it was "nothing" and given ointment,



Dr. Rainna Bahadur (left) and lens implant patient Thressa G. Baker of Gulfport, Miss., socialized at a 2010 Christmas party.

which didn't help. So she went to Bahadur, who found early-stage cancer in her eye. After surgery and systemic treatment, the cancer has been removed and vision restored.

"I'd been a little bit worried there – and I don't scare easy," that patient said of her eye cancer. "But it worked out great. I'm so happy. She checked me out for everything. It's been great."

Bahadur said the eye cancer didn't look like any textbooks, but she could tell the eye didn't look quite right, so she ran tests until she found the cancer. In fact, the pre-cancerous squamous cell lesion – an intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) – was so atypical that Bahadur shows photos of it at ophthalmology conferences now.

Utsey said her eye problem began with a bout of shingles. "The next thing I knew, I couldn't see out of my eye."

"I had shingles up in my forehead and hair. Then they got in my eye and I went blind," Utsey said of her traumatic vision loss. "So I went to



Dr. Rainna Bahadur (right) examines patient Gina Talianchich of Vancleave, Miss., at Eye Associates of the South's Biloxi clinic.



see Dr. Bahadur and she put a cornea transplant in there – and now I can see as good as you or anybody. I’m just thrilled to death!”

Much of Baker’s life had been limited by her poor vision, which isn’t unusual for eye patients. “They hold themselves back from life and don’t realize that it’s their vision,” Bahadur said. “If we can improve or even restore their vision, they’re so happy and they can look forward to a better quality of life.”

Baker works fulltime and has three children with husband John Baker, Jr. The couple grew up as next-door neighbors in Lyman, Miss. Baker is known for her good nature – and for wearing pop-bottle-thick eyeglasses since age 6. She was severely nearsighted, a minus 18, which is a poor vision level that less than 1 percent of the population suffers.

A few years ago, Baker also developed an ophthalmic condition known as “dry eyes,” which radically worsened when she became pregnant with their last child.

Thus, she couldn’t stand to wear her contact lens any more and, for various reasons, was a bad candidate for LASIK laser vision correction (which Bahadur also performs). Baker also was developing early cataracts and her sibling had double detached retinas, which means she is at risk for detachments during surgeries, especially with her high myopia (extreme nearsightedness).

But Baker reads all day for her work, so she had to have her eye problems corrected.

All of Baker’s complications made any treatment challenging, but Bahadur carefully planned a specialized cataract surgery to implant custom-ordered, powered cataract replacement lenses in both eyes to fully correct Baker’s nearsightedness. To prevent detached retinas, Knight performed a peripheral retinal laser treatment on



Rainna Bahadur, M.D., (left) reviews patient charts with Kimberly Benigno, O.D., at Eye Associates of the South’s clinic in Biloxi.

Baker in advance. Bahadur ran the phaco machine (the ultrasonic device that breaks down and removes cloudy human lenses), at 50 percent during Baker’s cataract surgery to minimize impact on Baker’s fragile eyes.

The results were stellar.

“The weekend after I had my eyes fixed, I looked at the beach and I just started crying,” Baker said. “I couldn’t stop crying because I never in my life had seen a view like that – never. I see better than I have in my whole life.”

“There are not enough words to express my gratitude,” Baker added. “I will forever be grateful, I mean forever.”

Bahadur also recently found a cancerous melanoma in the eye of a man who came in for a routine exam. She recently diagnosed multiple cases of multiple sclerosis (MS), lupus, diabetes, diabetic retinopathy, rheumatoid arthritis, various eye diseases, and had to inform a patient

who didn’t know that he was HIV positive. On emergency call, she often performs open globe and other trauma surgeries to save eyes injured by everything from car wrecks to fireworks.

“Early diagnosis matters. We also treat every patient as a person first, while we are taking care of their illness with them,” Bahadur said. “I’m proud of what ophthalmologists do.”

“I think what we do is amazing, with the technology that we have. And it is so rewarding.”

“I know that the skills we offer our patients can and do change the quality of their lives – whether it’s seeing that alarm clock in the morning without eyeglasses or contacts, or a senior citizen having their driving vision corrected so they can maintain their independence.”

Bahadur even got a “trophy” for it. Baker presented her with her old pop-bottle-thick lenses as a token of thanks.