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# Eye doctor's work can be 'life-changing'

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For the Commonwealth | 0 comments

**BILOXI** — Mary Utsey's eye problem began with a bout of shingles.

"I had shingles up in my forehead and hair. Then they got in my eye, and I went blind," the 87-year-old Biloxi resident said.

She turned to Biloxi ophthalmologist Dr. Rainna Bahadur for help. Bahadur performed cornea transplant surgery, and now Utsey sees 20/25 in that eye — almost perfect vision.

Restoring vision seems miraculous enough to many patients, but even more dramatic results can 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," Bahadur said in a news release.

"Everyday procedures can have profound, positive life-changing effects," she said.

A Greenwood native, Bahadur sees patients at Eye Associates of the South's clinics in Biloxi, Gulfport and Ocean Springs. She and her partner, Dr. Joel Knight, 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 initially practiced in Jackson, where she earned her medical degree from the University of Mississippi School of Medicine. She also was chief resident in UMC's Department of Ophthalmology.

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

Much of Baker's life had been limited by her poor vision.

People with poor vision "hold themselves back from life and don't realize that it's their vision," Bahadur said.

Baker works full time, and she and her husband, John Baker Jr., have three children. The couple grew up as next-door neighbors in Lyman. 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 her 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. 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 extreme nearsightedness.

Baker's complications made any treatment challenging. Bahadur 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 Baker in advance. Bahadur ran an ultrasonic device that breaks down and removes cloudy human lenses, called a phaco, at 50 percent during the cataract surgery to minimize impact on Bakers' eyes.

"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."

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, lupus, diabetes, diabetic retinopathy, rheumatoid arthritis and various eye diseases, and she had to inform a patient who didn't know that he was HIV positive.

On an emergency call, she often performs open globe and other trauma surgeries to save eyes injured by everything from car wrecks to fireworks.

With Baker, Bahadur received a "trophy" for her work. Baker presented her with her old thick lenses as a token of thanks.

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