

# RETINA CENTER SETS ITS SIGHTS ON PREVENTING BLINDNESS

Diseases of the eye's retina and vitreous body are the leading causes of blindness today. Left untreated, these increasingly common conditions may become irreversible. However, recent prevalence in the field has enabled retina specialists to halt the progress of these debilitating diseases, and in some cases, even improve the patient's vision.

Andrew Kimmel, MD, medical director of St. Luke's Retina Center, starts at the beginning. "Most of our readers know that the retina is the inner lining at the back of the eye that works like the film in a camera and is largely responsible for vision. The center of the retina, called the macula, allows a person to see fine detail.

"When I came to St. Luke's 18 years ago, the treatment of choice for diseases like diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration was laser surgery, which is still used for secondary cataracts. In fact, the Retina Center was previously called the Eye Laser Center. But advancements in technology and pharmaceuticals have enabled retina specialists to, in some cases, improve the vision of patients with these diseases."

Dr. Kimmel adds, "There's another contributor to the evolution of St. Luke's Retina Center that deserves to be recognized: the Network's administration. Near the turn of the century, with an aging population and a continual increase in diabetes-related and age-related diseases of the retina, our administration saw the need for a dedicated center at the Bethlehem Campus. Together, we created St. Luke's Retina Center — the only hospital-based retina center in the Lehigh Valley and the only clinic of its kind in a non-university hospital.

Cindy Huth, RN, clinical coordinator of St. Luke's Retina Center for the past five years, emphasizes the significance of new technology in the diagnosis, as well as the treatment of retinal diseases. "The introduction of specialized digital photography enables Dr. Kimmel to pinpoint the problem and plan the optimal treatment. I feel privileged to have been part of the Retina Center during this exciting evolution in the field."

Cindy, who graduated from St. Luke's School of Nursing in 1976, has worked in multiple service areas, providing both direct and indirect patient care, during her 20 years at St. Luke's. Also on the staff of the Retina Center is Michele Golden, PCA, who has spent 11 years at the center and 12 years at St. Luke's.

Commenting on the expertise of Cindy and Michele, Dr. Kimmel says, "I'm the surgeon, but with an average of 200 procedures a month, they are carrying the (eye)ball, and carrying it very, very well." The following letters (from dozens) written by patients of the Retina Center demonstrate that their efforts are truly appreciated:

"My family is calling me the 'miracle girl.' One and a half years ago, my life was turned upside down as I faced the possibility of losing my sight because of macular degeneration... Last week, I received a favorable report from Dr. Kimmel. On behalf of my family and myself, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation for the medical eye care that Dr. Kimmel provided... We want to thank Dr. Kimmel who patiently and lovingly brought his talent and training to my care. I am struck by his marvelous ability to perform his healing work with such concern and skill."



*Cindy Huth, RN, clinical coordinator of St. Luke's Retina Center, checks a patient as Dr. Andrew Kimmel looks on.*

"... I have been a patient of Dr. Kimmel for more than two years and to say I am very grateful doesn't really cover it, but what can you say to someone who has saved your eyesight... Without the dedication and caring of Dr. Kimmel and his entire staff I do not know what my life would be like today."

Comments like these illustrate why the Retina Center consistently achieves Press Ganey patient satisfaction scores from 94 to 99 for the center's 200 procedures per month, on patients whose average age is 60 years. Very impressive!

Dr. Kimmel reflects on the success of St. Luke's Retina Center, in terms of both results and access. "Twenty years ago, we couldn't do much to stop age-related macular degeneration and other blinding diseases of the retina. Today, we have a 95 percent chance of stopping the progression of wet macular degeneration and a 42 percent chance of actually improving vision in patients with this condition. We take pride in not only our capabilities and achievements, but also our commitment to deliver specialized, high-quality care to anyone who needs it, regardless of their insurance or their ability to pay. This is consistent with the mission of St. Luke's Hospital & Health Network."