

HEALTH BEAT 

# In U.S. for 2 years, immigrant is seeing it for the first time

Man gets the gift of sight, thanks to new technology, help from friends

By Joan Cary  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

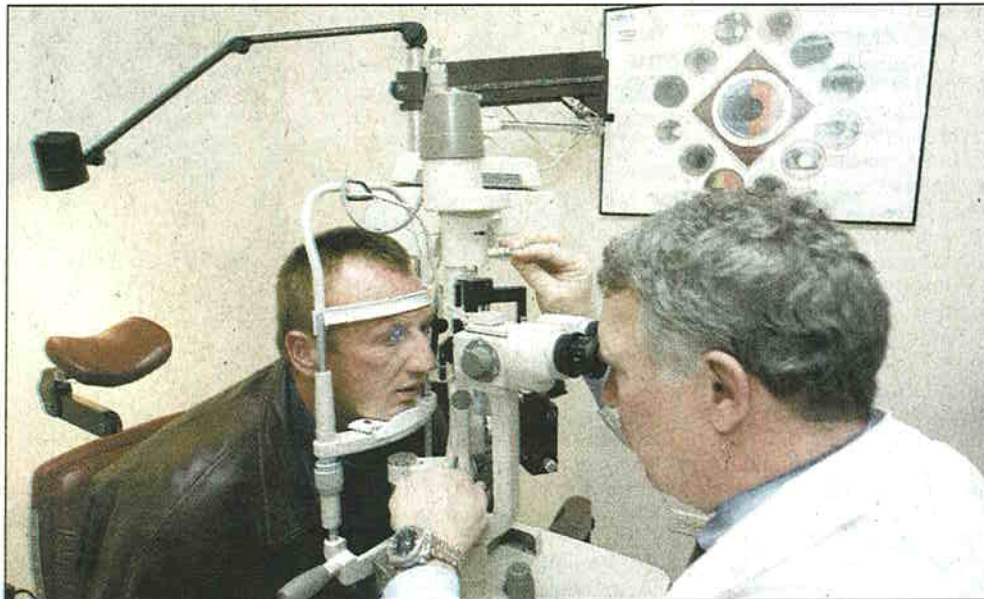
Andrew Turowski came to Chicago from Poland to find work two years ago, wearing glasses that were as thick as Coke bottles, but he was still not seeing well. He feared that by the time he returned home, his vision would be so bad that his children would need to lead him around by the hand.

But through the generosity of American friends, and high-tech surgery now available for the nearsighted, Turowski, 37, was given the gift of sight.

Turowski's vision was far beyond legal blindness, said Dr. Bruce Larson at the Larson Eye Center in Hinsdale. But with implantable Collamer lenses, similar to contact lenses but implanted in the eye, Turowski's vision is now perfect in one eye and near perfect in the other — with no glasses.

Turowski, who speaks no English, left his wife and two children behind to come to the U.S. to make money for his family. He worked first as a mechanic, was laid off, and then answered an ad in a Chicago Polish newspaper to care for horses. (His father-in-law in Poland has 40 horses.)

Donna Para and her boyfriend, Casey Zubek, a Hinsdale builder, had placed the ad, looking for someone to care for the 17 Dutch Harness horses at their farm in the Will County town of Manhattan, southeast of Joliet. The high-stepping horses compete nationally in combined driving events. Para said they placed the ad in a Polish



Dr. Bruce Larson looks at Andrew Turowski's eyes last month in Hinsdale. Turowski was all but blind before recent surgery. His vision now? Near perfect. MIKE BURLEY/PHOTOS FOR THE TRIBUNE



Donna Para and her boyfriend paid for Turowski's surgery, which runs about \$8,000. Turowski, who was able to see clearly shortly after having the surgery, cried tears of joy, Para said.

paper because she and Zubek speak Polish and English.

After they hired Turowski, it became apparent to Para that his vision was poor. Turowski needed eyeglasses so powerful that they caused distortion, Larson said, and Turowski was not a candi-

*"All (Turowski) says is that he is overwhelmed. You cannot describe the difference it has made for him."*

— Donna Para

date for Lasik surgery because Lasik has limits as to how much it can correct.

The implantable lenses, on the other hand, have no limits and are a permanent fix.

"Even when people like Andrew are wearing glasses, they are disabled. They don't see what everybody else does," Larson said.

Para, who came to the U.S. from Poland 22 years ago as a child, owns Donna's Cleaning Services. She and her crew have cleaned Larson's home for years. She and Zubek asked what Larson could do for their new friend and employee, and when they discovered that the surgery generally runs about \$8,000, they decided to give it as a gift to Turowski.

"(Andrew) is grateful for

what we did for him, and we are happy to have been able to do it," she said. "All he says is that he is overwhelmed. You cannot describe the difference it has made for him."

Larson performed Turowski's outpatient eye surgery at the Hinsdale Surgery Center. The surgery takes 10 to 15 minutes for each eye, which are operated on about two weeks apart.

Implantable lenses were approved in Europe in 1997, but it was not until 2005 that they were approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The Staar Surgical Co.'s Visian Collamer lens is made from Collamer, a patented material that has greater biocompatibility than acrylic and silicone lenses, Larson said.

The surgery is similar to cataract surgery, but with implants, the natural focusing lens of the eye is not removed.

The implant is tucked behind the iris and in front of the eye's lens. It does not touch any internal eye structure, cannot be seen and stays in place. There is no pain, according to Larson, who has performed the surgery on 10 to 15 people.

"The patient can literally sit up and see following the surgery, and by the following morning, after a night's rest, their vision is nothing short of amazing," Larson said. "It's a very emotional time for them."

Para said Turowski walked into the parking lot following his surgery and cried tears of joy. Doctors in Poland had said there was nothing they could do for the severe nearsightedness that he had suffered since childhood.

According to Staar Surgical, 621 doctors in the U.S. are qualified to perform the surgery.

The surgery is growing in popularity, according to Larson, but many people with less severe myopia can be helped by less expensive Lasik surgery.

The cost of the implantable lenses can be prohibitive, and because they do not alleviate difficulty with reading in people older than 40, reading glasses may still be required.

The risk of complications, such as infection, is 1 percent to 2 percent, the same as in cataract surgery, and the lens can be removed again if necessary.

"It is life-changing technology," Larson said. "Andrew had to hold things two inches from his face to see them well. Now he can read the charts within one line of perfection."

NOTES

**DINNER WITH THE DOC**

Dr. Sae Hahn answers questions about tests that help diagnose an abdominal aortic aneurysm. 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Jan. 13 in Danada House, 3 S 501 Naperville Road, Wheaton. Free. Registration required. Call 630-933-4234.

**LIFE SUPPORT**

American Heart Association class provides knowledge and skills to manage respiratory emergencies, acute coronary syndromes and stroke. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday in Edward Hospital, 801 S. Washington St., Naperville. \$200. Registration required. Call 630-527-6363.

**SHARE**

Support group for parents who have lost a baby through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth or early infant death. 7 to 9 p.m. Jan. 26 in Edward Education Center, 801 S. Washington St., Naperville. Free. Call 630-527-3263.

**SEIZURE AND EPILEPSY**

Support group for adults and children living with epilepsy and other seizure disorders. 7 to 9 p.m. Jan. 13 in Central DuPage Hospital, 25 N. Winfield Road, Winfield. Free. Call 630-289-5577.

Send information to Helene Van Sickle, Chicago Tribune, 3 Westbrook Corporate Center, Suite 800, Westchester, IL 60154 or west@tribune.com; fax: 708-562-0952. News staff: 708-498-4262.

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