

COMMUNITY**The Fillmore
Then and Now**KQED's too-narrow
focus**Page 7****PEOPLE****Dr. Ella
Faktorovich**A new vision
for eye surgery**Page 9****NEWS****More on
Mt. Zion**Medical School
says "ouch"**Page 5****T H E
NEW****FILLMORE**

Volume 14 Number 5

September 1999

**Dr. Ella Faktorovich has a vision for
eye surgery***by Judy Hulka*

I don't meet people with a passion for what they do every day. And, when I do, it seems personal passion too often turns into pipe dreams.

Not so for the soft-spoken, bright eyed brunette who is director of the recently opened Pacific Vision Institute here in the neighborhood in Daniel Burnham Court. Institute founder Ella Faktorovich, M.D., is both passionate and practical. She is the dreamer and doer behind a commercial enterprise with an altruistic purpose that harkens back to the Hippocratic Oath. Her professional objective for the Pacific Vision Institute is to be a leader in laser and refractive surgery. Yet her work is inspired by a more personal vision.

"My goal for every patient is perfect vision. I want my patients to be ecstatic when they walk out of here," she laughed with confidence. "This is one of the most important things, one of the joys I have as a doctor ... the satisfaction I have of giving somebody perfect vision." She is one of the few surgeons in the country to specialize exclusively in laser and refractive vision correction surgery.

Dr. Faktorovich says she tailors treatment to the individual rather than trying to fit patients into one or two procedures. Unlike most other private vision clinics, the Pacific Vision Institute does not promote one particular procedure, but claims to offer the most comprehensive education and treatment program of its kind in San Francisco today. Procedures there are tailored to the individual who wants to correct certain types of vision problems and obtain natural vision with the help of a highly skilled doctor using the latest FDA-approved technologies and cutting edge techniques. Correcting nearsightedness (myopia), farsightedness (hyperopia), and astigmatism is the focus of her work.

THE TECHNOLOGY RACE

Acronyms are frequent for the equipment-based procedures that are now available to correct vision problems that Dr. Faktorovich deals with. LASIK stands for laser-in-situ keratomileusis, used to correct mild, moderate and high levels of nearsightedness, as well as farsightedness and astigmatism. PRK stands for photorefractive keratectomy, a procedure that applies an excimer laser directly to the outer surface of the cornea in order to reshape it so that images can focus directly on the retina. PRK can correct mild levels of nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism.

Then there is Intacs™, a trademarked name for intracorneal ring segments, extremely fine strips of transparent material

applied to the eye's cornea to reshape it and correct mild to moderate degrees of nearsightedness.

Always interested in offering the latest, safe procedures for her patients, Dr. Faktorovich is the first ophthalmologist in private practice to have Intacs in San Francisco. Although this new, non-laser procedure was just approved by the FDA in April, she points out that "in the hands of an experienced surgeon, state-of-the-art procedures like these are highly effective."

Unlike other surgical procedures, Intacs can be removed, reversing the treatment as the patient's vision changes with age or he wants to use different vision treatments in the future. "An ideal candidate for Intacs," she says, "is mildly nearsighted and is interested in trying out clear, natural vision." She defines natural vision as unassisted vision or eyesight using no visual aids, such as glasses or contact lenses.

A PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE

If there could be a theme to the Pacific Vision Institute, I think it might marry medicine with today's mantra to be the best you can be, as well as reflect the personal philosophy of the founder herself. Dr. Faktorovich has achieved professional status as a Board Certified corneal surgeon and has carved out her niche in a cuttingedge medical specialty. Her educational history is stellar, ranging from a degree with honors from Berkeley to an M.D. from the University of California San Francisco, where she did her residency, to a fellowship at the Jules Stein Eye Institute, UCLA School of Medicine, where she still teaches on the clinical faculty. Her honors and awards range from Phi Beta Kappa to "Who's Who in Ophthalmology." But what sets her apart is her passion.

Dr. Faktorovich was inspired to specialize in ophthalmology when she was part of a research project in her first year of medical school at UCSF. "What attracted me was the concept of saving sight. Vision is something that we often take for granted. Yet it is a very sensitive system, and the moment that we have something just a little bit wrong, we are aware of that instantaneously. When people lose their vision, or have problems with vision it is a very disconcerting experience."

Her eyes lit up when she talked about her interest in working on the cornea. "It's just a membrane, basically, but it is the most powerful focusing system of the eye, and the cor-

nea is so exquisitely sensitive to imperfection. To be able to restore sight through work on the cornea takes a lot of skill because it is so sensitive. It does not tolerate imperfection, and I am a perfectionist to the maximum," she asserted with delight. From her personal history as a 14 year-old Russian immigrant to the confident 35 year-old doctor and businesswoman talking to me in her new offices of the Pacific Vision Institute, I wondered if her path was always so clear, if she was always so passionate. She told me that she knew in medical school that "to restore or preserve sight is something I wanted to devote my life to."

EDUCATION COMES FIRST

Pacific Vision Institute is part of a growing trend for patients to have procedures done outside of hospital operating rooms, particularly elective procedures that don't require any major anesthesia. And a key word here is "elective."

Because everything she does is elective, patient education is a big component of Dr. Faktorovich's work. "My primary goal is to inform the patient," she said, "because the procedures are elective." She is well aware that everyone whom she treats can choose to continue to wear glasses or contact lenses as an alternative. She encourages her patients to consider everything prior to undertaking any procedure she offers ...their lifestyle, the benefits, the risk factors, the available state-of-the art technologies and the data available to support their use, even her credentials as a doctor and surgeon.

As a result, the comprehensive services in laser and refractive surgery that are offered include not only extensive education services, but also in-depth counseling tailored to the individual. The typical patient goes through several steps in order to make an informed decision. According to Dr. Faktorovich, the process usually starts with a phone call. Prospective patients will typically talk with a phone counselor first so Dr. Faktorovich makes sure that the counselors are well educated, too. Then, most people elect to schedule a complimentary personal consultation where they receive brochures, articles, and view videos showing actual procedures. They can also be sent information in the mail and visit the Pacific Vision Institute's website at "www.pacificvision.org".

"I have a passion for the educational aspects of my field," the doctor pointed out, unabashed. "I think it comes natu-

rally to me having spent so much time in academia, teaching in the university setting. I love educating my staff, resident fellows or patients that come in,” she said, as she explained how much communication precedes her medical procedures.

HOW GOOD CAN IT GET?

“We need to find out the patient’s lifestyle preferences,” Dr. Faktorovich was careful to emphasize. “We spend quite a bit of time with every individual determining what they do with their time most of their day. What kind of visual needs they have. And then we recommend a procedure that is most appropriate for that lifestyle.”

She has developed a lifestyle questionnaire and has trained staff counselors to help gather information. “We have tests, too,” she explains, pointing out that she needs to keep educating her counselors every few weeks to keep them on the cutting edge of a rapidly changing field.

Although hers is a technology-driven medical specialty, wherein companies are in constant competition to introduce new and improved equipment and techniques, Dr. Faktorovich is not about to be left behind. She is both practical and philosophical when she puts herself in her patients’ shoes. “Your field is developing so rapidly,” people say all the time, “you think I should wait for another couple years?”

Her emphatic answer is “No.” And, as a scholar and professional, she uses data to prove her point. In May 1998, she and a UCLA colleague co-published an article in the Archives of Ophthalmology called “There Is No Benefit to Deferring Laser Refractive Surgery.” Her point was: “Just like with computers, you can wait and wait and wait, but, in the meantime, you’re not enjoying what we have to offer now. And what we have to offer now is pretty outstanding.”

Always relating the personal to the professional, Dr. Faktorovich is quick to point out that some of her patients are in professions where wearing glasses actually interferes with safety. “I have done procedures on a number of police officers,” she said, as an example. “Say you are on duty, you wear glasses, you’re chasing a subject, and your glasses fall off,” she laughed, with her characteristic empathy. “Why you could be quite incapacitated.”

I also learned that other people who prefer laser and re-

fractive surgery include recreational and professional athletes for whom assisted visual aids, such as glasses and contact lenses or inconvenient are just plain impractical. Like other physicians, she gets referrals from doctors. But more often than not, her work speaks for itself. “I find now that a lot of people know somebody with a good outcome,” she said with pride, “and that’s always very convincing.”

While I was biding time in her waiting room, I talked with two patients that had surgery within the week and were back for follow-up visits. A woman in her 30’s told me how amazed she was to have no physical discomfort at all after the procedure, even though she had been prepared to expect it. Dr. Faktorovich had told me that she’s done quite a bit of research on healing after the procedures.

Another younger woman, Junko Kita from Japan, told me she had had the LASIK procedure done just yesterday and had no pain, was very comfortable and had 20/20 vision today. “I called my family in Japan ... my Mom ... and she was so happy to hear that. Before, I couldn’t walk alone without glasses, couldn’t put on my make-up or be comfortable doing sports because my contact lenses didn’t fit,” she reported.

Too energetic to simply practice medicine and let her work speak for itself, Dr. Faktorovich is enthusiastic to speak for her work. As part of her mission to educate people, she does community outreach programs as often as possible. For example, this summer she was an invited speaker to the Commonwealth Club and to the Police Officers Association. She has written articles for the San Francisco Firefighters’ Mainline newsletter and other consumer publications while she continues to publish professional articles and abstracts on eye biology, laser vision correction and refractive surgery, and serve on the editorial board for the San Francisco Medical Society Magazine.

The Pacific Vision Institute, which she expects will grow to about 30 in staff, has her wearing many more hats than the average doctor. “Yes, it’s challenging, but above all else, I think you have to have a passion for it,” she told me. “I love what I do.”

Anyone wanting more information on the Pacific Vision Institute can call them at (415) 922-9500 or visit their website at www.pacificvision.org.