

How many myopes will have refractive surgery?

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Dr. Taylor is both an optometrist and a consultant at Arthur D. Little specializing in analyzing the refractive surgery market. Many people consider the firm of Arthur D. Little to be the preeminent consulting firm in this field. Both Dr. Taylor and Arthur D. Little have been important in creating models to estimate the size of the potential refractive surgery market in the U.S.

The Arthur D. Little model, which many of us are somewhat familiar with, assumes an initial pool of 12 million myopes in the US. This model uses a 2% conversion rate for the percentage of myopes who will choose to have refractive surgery. (Whether or not the real conversion rate may be closer to 1% remains to be seen). The model makes the further assumption that most patients will eventually have refractive surgery performed on both eyes.

Arthur D. Little estimates that between 75,000 - 85,000 PRKs were performed in the US in 1996. For the 1997 calendar year, they estimate that about 180,000 refractive procedures will be performed in the US, the majority of which will be PRKs.

It is true that the majority of these refractive procedures were done at one of several large centers. However, the fact that more installed centers are coming on line every year bodes well for the future of refractive surgery, according to Dr. Taylor. This expansion of the market also points to increasing depth and breadth of the refractive market.

Dr. Taylor also reviewed the distribution of refractive surgery between PRK and LASIK. Last year, for example, approximately 35 - 45% of the refractive procedures performed in the US were LASIK. This percentage is somewhat biased by the large numbers of LASIK performed by some large academic centers (such as Emory University). However, the rest of the country is predicted to eventually follow this lead, allowing for some lag time for the entire country to catch up to the "state of the art."

Dr. Taylor also reviewed current prices for PRK vs. LASIK in different regions of the country. In southern California, for example, some practices are performing as many as 100 PRKs per month, and charging approximately \$1500 per eye. Fees per procedure have historically been somewhat higher on the east coast. These high rates will probably not hold up, however, in Dr. Taylor's opinion, as the market matures. On average across the nation, PRK is going for approximately \$1500 per eye, compared to approximately \$2000 per eye for LASIK.

To date, approximately 400 excimer lasers have been installed in the US. The corporate laser centers have shown considerable growth across the board this past year, leading Dr. Taylor to be very bullish about the future of refractive surgery in this country (this may be a poor choice of words, coming on the heels of one of the largest one-day declines in the history of Wall Street).

Arthur D. Little predicts that refractive procedures will continue to grow until at least the year 2000, since the 2% conversion rate will not be reached until then. They further predict that LASIK, not PRK, will eventually become the predominant "procedure of choice."

Dr. Taylor concludes by reiterating, "This is still an embryonic market." Which means that the future of refractive surgery is now--an exciting, future, indeed.