

Safety of Laser Eye Surgery

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In considering the controversy over the safety of laser eye surgery to correct refractive errors, the public should understand the difference between the standards Canada places on new drugs and new surgical procedures.

For drugs, we demand the highest standard of controlled research studies to clearly demonstrate effectiveness and initial evidence of safety, and post-marketing surveillance to confirm long-term safety. For surgical procedures such as laser eye surgery, we require no controlled trials at all, and no systematic surveillance for adverse effects.

For prescription drugs, we forbid direct-to-consumer advertising, and demand that advertising to physicians include adverse effects of the drug. For surgical procedures we allow direct-to-consumer advertising, with no standards whatsoever, and no requirement to even mention adverse effects.

The standards for pharmaceutical products are the appropriate ones. The laser eye surgery controversy highlights the necessity for legislation to protect the public from potential adverse effects of surgical procedures in the for-profit health care sector.