



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON, DC**

DEC 11 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

FROM: HQ USAF/SG
110 Luke Avenue, Room 400
Bolling AFB, DC 20332-7050

SUBJECT: The USAF "Warfighter" Photorefractive Keratectomy (PRK) Program
(SG Policy Letter # 01-004)

The Chief of Staff establishes policy for PRK at Air Force Laser Centers for Active Duty Air Force Personnel other than Aviation and Special Duty Personnel. Aviation and Special Duty Personnel are covered under a separate policy dated 2 Aug 00. PRK is an FDA-approved, elective procedure to reduce the need for corrective lenses.

Glasses and contact lenses can be an operational disadvantage. PRK is to enhance performance and safety in military duties. It is not a medical benefit, and there is no requirement for any member to obtain PRK. Corrective lenses may still be required in order to meet vision standards after PRK. Contact lens fitting and wear may be difficult after PRK. Laser-In-Situ-Keratomileusis (LASIK) is not authorized or performed at Air Force Laser Centers.

There is a small risk of not meeting relevant vision standards after PRK. This could result in permanent disqualification from certain career fields or even continued military service. The estimated risk is under one percent. The vision complication/poor quality rate increases as the degree of nearsightedness and astigmatism increases; therefore, disqualification rates may be higher for those individuals.

After undergoing PRK, there will be an average one-week convalescence before the individual returns to duty. Normal duties may be limited for another one to two weeks depending upon the specific vision requirements of the individual's career field. Individuals with greater amounts of nearsightedness and/or astigmatism may have duty restrictions for up to one month. Personnel are restricted from mobility status for up to four months following PRK. Once steroid eye drops are discontinued, the mobility restriction will be lifted providing all other vision requirements are met.

Active duty personnel other than pilots may obtain PRK at any operational AF Laser Center. Requirements for personnel other than Aviation and Special Duty personnel to apply for treatment at these centers and required follow-up are at Attachment 1. Failure to comply with required follow-up and submission of required documentation at any time will result in duty restrictions.

Squadron commander permission is required for PRK at an AF Laser Center. While there is no charge for the actual medical treatment, the trip to the laser center for personnel other than Aviation and Special Duty personnel may be unit-funded TDY, permissive TDY or regular leave depending on the Squadron Commander's assessment of the member's operational need for the procedure. For active duty personnel other than pilots, the number allowed per year is not restricted, but commanders should consider mission impact. Personnel should have one-year retainability at the time of surgery.

Access to treatment at AF Laser Centers is dependent on the condition of the individual's eyes and will be prioritized based upon the operational impact of corrective lenses in the performance of military duties. Technology upgrades frequently add new capability to treat refractive errors. Therefore, clinical eligibility for treatment will be determined by the operating surgeon within the FDA approved applications of the laser used. Operational eligibility will be assessed by the individual's squadron commander who must certify the prioritization category of the individual IAW the guidelines in Attachment 2. Personnel in Category 1 already have access to the laser centers. Personnel in Category 2 will have access upon publication of this policy. Access for personnel in Categories 3 and 4 will be announced at a later date.

Responsibilities of the member, squadron commander, local eye-care provider, MAJCOMs, AF Laser Centers and AFMOA/SGZC are in Attachment 3.

My point of contact for this policy is Lt Col Kimberly A. Slawinski, Chief Consultant for Surgical Services, AFMOA/SGZC, 110 Luke Avenue, Room 405, Bolling AFB, DC 20332-7050, DSN 297-4071, commercial (202) 767-4071 or e-mail: kimberly.slawinski@usafsg.bolling.af.mil



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Lieutenant General, USAF, MC, CFS
Surgeon General

Attachments:

1. USAF "Warfighter" PRK Program
2. Guidelines for Treatment Prioritization
3. Responsibilities

cc:

AFROTC/CC
AFRS/CC