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Visual experience during phacoemulsification cataract surgery under topical anesthesia

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Purpose: Visual awareness during phacoemulsification cataract surgery is an important determinant of patient satisfaction with any anesthetic technique. Topical anesthesia could be associated with significant visual awareness because it does not affect optic nerve function. The aim of this study is to evaluate visual experience and satisfaction after phacoemulsification with topical anesthesia. Methods: The visual experience during phacoemulsification cataract surgery under topical anesthesia was assessed for unselected patients. None of the patients was sedated. Patients were interviewed immediately after surgery using a standardized questionnaire that explored specific aspects of their visual experience which included vision of: a) microscopic light, b) colours (white, blue, yellow, red, green, gray), c) vague movements, d) surgical instruments, e) change in light brightness during surgery. The questionnaire included also what the patient found about the visual experience during the surgery: frightening, unpleasant, indifferent, pleasant, very pleasant. Results: The study is still in progress but until now, none of the patients found the visual experience unpleasant. The majority of them could see the microscopic light and at least one colour during surgery (white and blue were more common). Vision of surgical instruments was not reported. Conclusions: The final results will be presented later. Preoperative patient counseling before phacoemulsification cataract surgery under topical anesthesia should include information about the visual experience during surgery. The results of this study may be useful for preoperative counselling, though it is important to emphasize the variable nature of the visual experience.