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I can see clearly now

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By Karen McEnany-Phillips
The Voice

Imagine informing a parent that their child's eye disorder is irreversible and that it might have been treatable had it been diagnosed earlier. Imagine doing this every day.

Faced with this frustrating scenario, a group of South Florida ophthalmologists and optometrists invited Lake Mary resident David Melnik to help. Melnik has a track record of significantly transforming industries and incubates new businesses targeting child health and wellness.

The self-service check-in airport kiosk is his invention. Melnik built a relationship with German manufacturer Plusoptix — which uses auto-refractive and video-retinoscopy — and PediaVision was born.

"We worked together to adapt their technology to the mass marketplace of children, parents and pediatricians," said Melnik, PediaVision CEO.

The revolutionary tool is a handheld scanner that screens and analyzes eyes of children as young as 6 months. In seconds, a digital photo taken from 3 feet away reads the refraction of both eyes and gives an instant pass or refer result. Melnik said the scanner is an effective tool for pediatricians who generally don't use much technology in their practice.

A child's symptoms may manifest with clumsiness, squinting, eye rubbing, avoiding close work and in later years, poor school performance. But often the child and parent do not recognize vision problems. The scenario became personal when Melnik's son's second-grade teacher suggested he might need glasses.

"As a parent I had no idea how severe vision issues were and how lax the vision screening is," Melnik said. "My kid didn't know he couldn't see properly and it turned out he had a pretty severe correction. We didn't understand how he could suddenly need glasses."

Statistics show one in four children have vision problems, and 95 percent are treatable if diagnosed by age 5 — a critical timeframe, as 70 percent of children's learning is visual.

This tool aids pediatricians who are the gatekeepers to children's health, especially with pre-verbal infants and toddlers, too young to respond and communicate what they see.

Dr. Miles Landis of Lake Mary Pediatrics has been using the PediaVision scanner for more than a year and agrees that it is an effective vision-screening tool.

"It's easy; it's fun; the kids and our nurses like it," Landis said. "First it is very good for babies. A few months ago there was an infant that needed strong correction, there's no way we would have picked it up otherwise."

Landis also sees a benefit for toddlers and children who hate going to the doctor.

"They don't want to be here, or they're hungry or cranky, so it works well sitting on mom's lap in a slightly darkened room, the scanner makes a funny noise that gets their attention."

Landis described kids' reactions after they get glasses and are able to see well.

"They look at the sky and see clouds with definition for the first time. The mothers can't believe it."

Landis finds that families with a history of eye disorders are more receptive to the screening, as are patients from word-of-mouth referrals.

Common eye disorders are astigmatism, myopia (nearsightedness), hyperopia (farsightedness) and anisometropia (differences between the eyes). Landis sees screening of amblyopia (lazy eye) as significant.

"With amblyopia, when one eye is good and one is bad the brain will pick up the good eye and shut off signals to the bad eye," he said. "After a few years the bad eye won't ever be better. A kid at 6 or 8 years old may be diagnosed at 20/80 with correction and that is as good as it will ever be."

Landis explained the brain-eye connection: "People think that seeing comes from the eye itself — not true. You need the brain to decode the signals and the brain won't waste its time on an eye that won't function."

Melnik said that the PediaVision scanner is not meant to diagnose, but to provide effective screening.

"At the end of the day, all we do is screen," Melnik said, "but we've saved a child's eyesight. It's exhilarating to make such a profound impact."

Melnik said some health insurance providers are beginning to cover PediaVision, and Landis said most don't yet. His office charges \$18 for the screening without insurance.

For more information on PediaVision visit PediaVision.com.

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