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EyeNet Blog @ the Academy



Charles Kelman—A Modern-Day Miracle Worker

Posted on Oct. 25 by David F. Chang, MD

"PHACOEMULSIFICATION" ... this is what cataract surgeons do every week and is therefore a ubiquitous term in our professional lexicon. Although we now take these for granted, we all understand the great advantages of phaco—dramatically improving the safety, speed, predictability and outcome of both the operation and the patient's visual rehabilitation. The meaning and significance of "phaco," however, is lost on the general public—including patients who themselves have had the procedure.

What a shame it is that the public and our nonophthalmic medical colleagues do not appreciate what a true medical miracle phacoemulsification is, nor the fact that every year, it improves more lives globally than any other single surgical procedure. I am hoping that this public perception may change thanks to a recently completed PBS documentary on the life of Charles Kelman. "[Through My Eyes: The Dr. Charles D. Kelman Story](#)" will have a special inaugural screening here at the Academy's Joint Meeting tomorrow (Monday, Oct. 26) at 12:30 p.m. in the Esplanade Ballroom. Fittingly, it will follow the fifth annual Kelman Lecture, which this year will be given by Bob Osher, to conclude the morning's Cataract Spotlight Symposium.

As a medical advisor to the filmmaker, I have previewed the documentary and I think that ophthalmologists will delight in the final product. Charlie Kelman's remarkable life could indeed have been scripted for a Hollywood movie, and the photos, videos and interviews vividly recount the amazing story behind this multitalented but unconventional doctor ... and his controversial, but ultimately revolutionary, invention. As we all know, this is also a story about the perils of innovation—daring to think outside the box, nervously testing new ideas in patients, and then having to prove prominent critics in the medical establishment wrong—all with your career and reputation on the line.

I hope that the public will be captivated by this true story—a human drama about creativity, passion, perseverance, and taking risks—that explores the essence of innovation, while reminding us to forever keep our own minds open. I am glad that viewers should also emerge with a strong appreciation of just how extraordinary an achievement modern cataract surgery is. Finally, ophthalmologists of every age will learn something new and interesting about this amazing chapter in our proud history. We and our patients are the fortunate beneficiaries of Charlie Kelman's genius and hard work, and this documentary will remind us and future generations of how grateful we all should be.

I hope you will view the documentary, and then contribute your thoughts and reaction to this blog.

Meanwhile, of Charlie Kelman's contemporaries, who else do you consider to be among the most influential surgical innovators in ophthalmology?

David F. Chang, MD, is the Annual Meeting Program committee chairman. He is clinical professor of ophthalmology at the University of California, San Francisco, and in private practice in Los Altos, Calif. Financial disclosure: Consultant to Alcon, AMO, Calhoun Vision, Eyemaginations, LensAR, Peak Surgical and Visiogen. Equity owner in Calhoun Vision, Revital Vision and Visiogen. Receives lecture fees from Allergan, grant support from Ista, and



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[David Paton](#)

Score: 0

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8:24 AM on November 21, 2009

Excellent review by Dr. Chang. I have not yet seen the documentary but may be a part of it -- one never knows about the editing process.

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Should any colleagues care to read a 17 page article entitled The Trouble With Charles Kelman that I have written, it can be found in a website for a book in preparation, secondsightbook.com. That Kelman article is not a part of the book but from the same author. The message is not as it is intended to sound.

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