

Implanted tooth helps blind US woman recover sight

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A 60-year-old US grandmother, blind for nearly a decade, has recovered her sight after surgeons implanted a tooth in her eye as a base to hold a tiny plastic lens, her doctors said Wednesday.

Sharron "Kay" Thornton, from the southern US state of Mississippi, lost her sight in 2000 when she came down with a case of Stevens-Johnson syndrome, a rare disease that scarred her cornea, according to the University of Miami's Bascom Palmer Eye Institute.

For patients whose bodies reject a transplanted or artificial cornea, this procedure "implants the patient's tooth in the eye to anchor a prosthetic lens and restore vision," said Thornton's surgeon Victor Perez.

In the procedure -- which was pioneered in Italy but was a first in the United States -- the medical team extracted Thornton's canine or "eyetooth" and surrounding bone, shaved and sculpted it, and drilled a hole into it to insert an optical cylinder lens.

"We take sight for granted, not realizing that it can be lost at any moment," the grateful patient said. "This truly is a miracle."

She said people should imagine what it is like "if you could keep your eyes closed just for one week... it's amazing what you see when you open your eyes again."

The tooth and the lens were implanted under the patient's skin in the

cheek or shoulder for two months so they could bond, then they were carefully implanted in the center of the eye after a series of procedures to prepare the socket.

"A hole is made in the mucosa for the prosthetic lens, which protrudes slightly from the eye and enables light to re-enter the eye allowing the patient to see once again," read an Eye Institute statement.

Following a series of operations, medical personnel removed the bandages from Thornton's eyes two weeks ago.

She was able to recognize objects and faces a few hours later, and two weeks later she was able to read newspapers, the Eye Institute said.

"I'm looking forward to seeing my seven youngest grandchildren for the first time," said Thornton.

"Through the work of (the) team, patients in the United States now have access to this complex surgical technique, which has been available only in a limited number of centers in Europe and Asia," said Eduardo Alfonso, chairman of Bascom Palmer Eye Institute.

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