

Trying to get LVI's advertised rates for LASIK? Good luck.

an ABC Action News report 7/22/03 related story: Action News investigates Lasik Vision Institute after complaints (7/21/03)



TAMPA - Ads for discounted LASIK eye surgery are everywhere, but as ABC Action News investigator Mike Mason found, picking the place with the best price could turn out to be the worst thing you do. One ad that has caught the eyes of many potential patients supposedly offers LASIK surgery for \$299 an eye at the Lasik Vision Institute in Tampa, with a free initial consultation. It looks like quite a deal, but Mike's investigation revealed it might not be so easy to get that cut-rate offer.

Earlier this year, the Federal Trade Commission filed a complaint against LVI for making false claims. After the manager at the LVI on Fowler wouldn't say how many patients actually get LASIK for \$299 an eye, we decided to try and find out ourselves.

Action News sent a member of our team inside LVI with a hidden camera. Jason Meier, a patient counselor with no medical background, explains the cost of the surgery, offering three different package deals. When our patient asked if he could get the advertised deal for \$299, "he said my eyes were very much out of the range of that \$299," Dre Sandoval recalled. Even before his eyes were thoroughly examined by a medical professional, Meier told our patient he doesn't qualify for the special rate. Instead, Meier offered LASIK surgery for \$1,799 per eye, a total of nearly \$3,600.

To be sure it's the right choice, our patient asked to meet with the surgeon before he signed any papers. "We asked to meet the doctor, but both couldn't because they were in surgery," Sandoval continued. That sounds like a reasonable explanation, but then our patient was told he had to put down a \$100 deposit before meeting the surgeon. When our patient refused, the counselor walked out. "He actually showed a little bit of anger," Sandoval added.



Jason Meier appears on the undercover video, asking for \$100 before the patient meets the surgeon.

A couple of weeks later, Mike Mason tried to speak with Jason Meier on camera, but the office manager would not let Mike in the building. "I do mind if you come in here. You have to wait," Laura Eckert said before closing the door on Mike. "Do you ever do surgeries for \$299 per eye?" Mike asked. "Yes, we do," Eckert claimed, "but I can't talk to you." Action News spoke with six LVI patients who had surgery on the same day. None got the advertised special, though that was what brought four of the six in the door.



Musa spouted little more than ad slogans when confronted by Mike Mason.

The president of LVI, Marco Musa, claims the company still has the best deal in town. Mike Mason caught up with him at LVI's corporate headquarters in Palm Beach County. "I challenge you to put out there the truth of the matter, and the fact of the matter is we provide the very best surgeons out there, the most experienced surgeons, at the overall average price to be the lowest in the nation. I challenge you to do that," Musa stammered. "I challenge you to show me how many people you've done surgery for for \$299 per eye," Mike countered. "I will promise you I'll do that - I hope you

print that - as long as I have your promise you'll print what I just said," Musa replied.

Action News aired and published that statement, but Marco Musa did not keep his promise. An attorney for LVI later claimed the company does not track how many patients actually get Lasik for \$299 an eye.