

---

## Five blinded after cataract surgery performed at West Springfield clinic: 'Everything went black'



By Michelle Williams | [Michelle.Williams@MassLive.com](mailto:Michelle.Williams@MassLive.com)

[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#)

on August 23, 2016 at 1:12 PM, updated August 23, 2016 at 2:02 PM

At 72 years old, Jim Craig had plans for his retirement.

After working as a librarian for 49 years - 45 at the University of Massachusetts Amherst - Craig retired in his early 70s intending to stay active. His plans changed a year later when he lost vision in one eye.

On May 20, 2014, Craig had cataract surgery performed at the Cataract & Laser Center West in West Springfield.

"I had cold feet just before I went in and everyone said, 'What are you worrying about? It's just cataract surgery,'" Craig said last week.

Cataract surgery is one of the safest and most successful surgical procedures performed, according to National Eye Institute of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with about 90 percent of procedures resulting in better vision. The majority of Americans either have a cataract or have had cataract surgery by age 80.

The surgery was quick - around 15 minutes - but didn't go as Craig expected. After drops were placed in his eye and he was hooked up to an IV, he sat in one of the center's recliners so the anesthesiologist could inject a numbing agent into his eye.

"The needle went in and I went 'oh, oh, oh' It was like a three-step process of the needle going into my eye that I could feel," Craig said. "Then everything was black."

After the injection, he was taken into the operating room for the surgery.

The following day, everything remained black. During his follow-up appointment, the patch was removed from his eye and Craig was asked to read a chart on the wall. He couldn't.

"I was told it was inflammation," Craig said. "Then when they looked they could see it was blood."

He was diagnosed with a punctured retina and rushed to Baystate Medical Center for emergency surgery to close the hole.

He is one of five patients who had corrective vision surgery performed at the clinic that day and lost their vision out of the operated upon eye. They were five of 45 patients seen that day.

Two of the five spoke to MassLive about their surgery. Both were operated upon by Dr. John P. Frangie with Dr. Tzay Chiu as their anesthesiologist.

One of the patients - who wished to be identified only as a 65-year-old resident of Berkshire County - said she became concerned after her eye was numbed for the procedure.

"I remember Dr. Chiu saying he was going to numb the muscles in my eye with a needle. When he did it, it hurt. I yelled," she said. "He put his head down and said, 'I'm bad, I'm bad,' and that's when it threw me."

During her follow-up appointment, she could not see out of her operated upon eye. Also taken to Baystate for emergency surgery, she was told her eye's globe was punctured and lidocaine was shot into it.

The lidocaine was injected by Chiu during his second day at the Center.

In a letter sent to a patient by the Cataract & Laser Center West and shared with MassLive, Medical Director Andrew Jusko said the injuries were not preventable. He wrote that a "retinal perforation could have resulted from an error in technique during the administration of anesthesia medication prior to your surgery." However, he said, Chiu is "an experienced anesthesiologist with extensive prior experience in performing, without incident, the type of eye block anesthesia you received."

Following an internal investigation, the center said "the event in this case was not preventable."

Chiu came to work for the West Springfield center on the recommendation of an anesthesiologist "broker" that had a contract with the center. The Cataract & Laser Center told the Department of Public Health that Chiu's hiring raised no red flags at the time as he had the proper training, experience and two letters of reference.

While under investigation by the Board of Registration in Medicine, Chiu is allowed to practice but not perform eye blocks, the procedure believed to have blinded the five patients.

As the matter remains under investigation, patients have adjusted to their lack of vision.

"I'd expected to be a lot more active in retirement," Craig said. "I find I don't like to be out in situations where I'm reminded that I can't really see so I'm doing more reading and watching television - though I have trouble even seeing things on the screen."

He'd hoped to travel more in his retirement, for work and pleasure, though driving has become difficult. Craig had planned to work part-time as a bibliotemp, on short-term assignments at libraries throughout Massachusetts. Fearful of driving long distances, at night or during poor weather, Craig declined to accept such a position.

With her vision limited as well, the 65-year-old resident of Berkshire County has also modified her lifestyle.

After working in healthcare for four decades, she gave up nursing. "You have to be on your toes. You have to be able to see your surroundings," she said.

She's not as active as she once was. "I'm a walker, easy four-to-six miles a day," she said. "Now it's limited me. I don't go into the woods as much as I used to, I can't see if anything is coming up on me on my left side."

The pair are two of three patients represented by John P. Connor, of the Greenfield firm Stobierski & Connor. William Thompson of Lubin & Meyer in Boston represents the other two patients who lost their vision. Both believe the injuries could have been prevented.

"This is what can only be referred to as a never event. Five injuries of this type from an anesthesiologist in one day is a never event," Connor said. "All three of my clients came to me with the same sentiment - that they're reluctant to be involved in litigation, these are not litigious people by nature, but all have the sentiment that they never want to see this happen again."

---

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)

© 2016 MassLive LLC. All rights reserved ([About Us](#)).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of MassLive LLC.

[Community Rules](#) apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

[▶ Ad Choices](#)