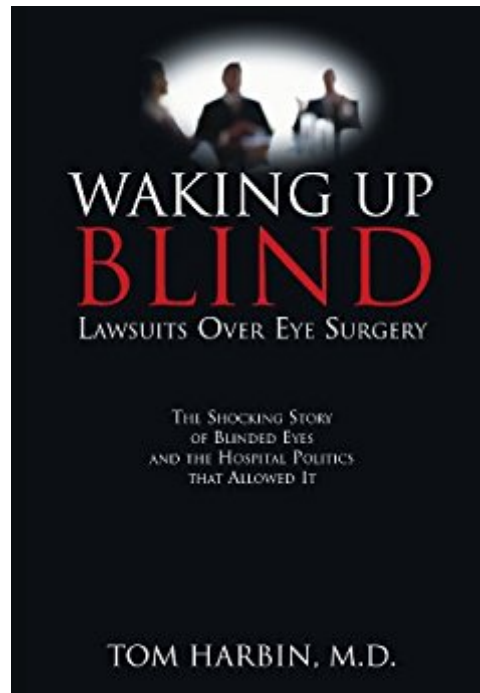




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Waking Up Blind: Lawsuits Over Eye Surgery



Synopsis

Waking Up Blind: Lawsuits over Eye Surgery By Tom Harbin, MD
Summary
In the early 1980s, professors at a highly-respected academic medical center began to notice problems with their gifted chairman, a powerful figure on campus. His patients complained of long delays and rushed exams. His bills to Medicare and insurance companies were suspect. Too often, the tissue that he removed from patient's eyes showed no sign of the disease that he had diagnosed. The professors and finally the Dean urged this chairman to mend his ways. He did not. His hurried care of patients was reaping profits for the medical center and his academic pursuits were increasing the center's prestige. He seemed to know that he'd be protected by the medical center's top leaders. He was right. Finally, on a typically rushed day, he operated on the wrong eye of a patient, who eventually went blind from an easily detected and treatable problem. A departmental committee investigation found improper billing, examples of patients' eyes harmed by neglect, and multiple other problems. Once again, the university's leaders paid little heed, approving a committee recommendation that did nothing more than ask its own chairman to slow down. Lawsuits and continued complaints from two faculty whistleblowers prompted a university ethics investigation. The result: exoneration for the chairman and a reprimand for a whistleblower. Only after a national specialty society ethics investigation and even more lawsuits was the chairman forced to resign. What little was known of the story made headlines at the time, but now the full story is told, backed by court documents, official transcripts, letters and personal interviews.

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Customer Reviews

Shortly before 6 pm on September 12, 1983, I found myself sitting in the surgery suite at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. What I did not know at the time, but learned later, was that a horrible mistake was about to happen right after I left. The next patient in line, an elderly African American man named Sargus Houston was scheduled to have surgery performed on his right eye, but the surgery was done on the left. That accident set in motion a chain of events that was to alter the lives of countless individuals, including my own, over the next several years. The facts are now spelled out publicly for the first time in Tom Harbin's book (Waking up Blind: Lawsuits Over Eye Surgery, Langdon Street Press, 2009). I was a direct witness to some of the happenings detailed in the book, but mostly what I knew about these events as they were playing out was revealed via the grapevine of whispers in the shadows of the hallways at Emory University. I was only a bystander, but not an emotionally neutral one; more akin to an eyewitness to a mugging. A quarter of a century has passed since these events occurred, and I am now retired from Emory University. Over the years I heard rumors via the grapevine that numerous lawsuits pertaining to the events I had witnessed had been settled, and that Emory University had been forced to pay out millions of dollars to various injured parties. However, the results of these settled lawsuits were sealed, and I had resigned myself to accepting the reality that the details about what had happened, the good, the bad, and the ugly, would never see the light of day. I am gratified to see that Tom Harbin's book has now shined a spotlight on what was kept hidden for far too long.

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