



After nine months of renovation work Augenkl. Berlin Marzahn opened in January 1998

Helping patients see clearly

Cataract treatment is one of the small miracles of modern medicine. Where clouded lenses in the eyes once meant blindness for many older patients, a straightforward ten-minute procedure now gives these patients a new lease of life and clear vision. Ask anyone who has had the procedure carried out and they will doubtless sing its praises and enthuse about how, after years of wearing glasses, they have been able to throw them away. Augenkl. Berlin Marzahn GmbH is a specialist eye centre serving Berlin and Brandenburg that carries out thousands of these operations each year, making a huge difference to the quality of life of the city's senior citizens.

Cataract surgery was pioneered over 50 years ago by British surgeon Harold Ridley, who received a knighthood in 2000 for his work. It is thought that over 200 million people around the world have had their sight saved since then and the technique continues to help over five million people each year. Augenkl. Berlin Marzahn is one of the leading eye treatment clinics in Berlin and carries out a full range of eye surgery including emergency surgery. However, cataract treatment accounts for 52% of clinical treat-

ment and 50% of in-patient and ambulatory procedures. "Cataracts are the most common cause of blindness in people over the age of 50. Thanks to surgery we can offer patients a cure," says Director Jürgen H. Schüler. A cataract is the term given to clouding in the human lens as proteins in the lens degenerate with age. Over time this leads to a dimming in that person's vision as light is unable to penetrate to the retina. This process can lead to complete blindness. In cataract surgery, an artificial lens is

inserted into the eye to replace the clouded lens and restore clear vision. The operation takes as little as seven minutes and is carried out on an out-patient basis. The average age of the patients treated at the Marzahn clinic lies between 70 and 80 years, reflecting the dominant role played by cataract surgery. "We are recognised as a specialist in the area of out-patient treatment for cataracts and are seen as leaders in this area," says Mr. Schüler. Augenkl. Berlin Marzahn was opened in January 1998 following a

nine-month renovation. The building that the clinic occupies dates back to 1893. Since that time there are several hospitals on the premises. The renovation work involved gutting the entire building and installing completely new technical equipment. The clinic is now one of the biggest and most modern eye clinics in Germany. It mainly serves the east of Berlin and its catchment area is home to a population of 1.3 million people. The main building boasts 5,700 m² of space while a separate building close by provides a

further 1,100 m². Both the buildings and the park they stand in enjoy protected status.

In addition to three state of the art operating theatres, 14 treatment rooms and welcoming consultation areas, the clinic offers 51 in-patient rooms. Of these, 27 are in the main building and the rest are housed in the adjacent building. "All of the rooms are twin rooms with en-suite bathroom, television and telephone. We have tried to create a feeling like that of staying in a hotel rather than a hospital so the rooms are decorated normally and have been made as comfortable and non-intimidating as possible," says Administration Director Petra Leiste. This is the face of modern patient care at its best where a holistic approach is taken to treatment. "Through their insurance contributions, patients in Germany pay a great deal towards their treatment and expect to receive the best possible service. It is becoming a very competitive sector and we have set ourselves the goal of being the best," says Mr. Schüler.

Augenkl. Berlin Marzahn is privately owned and operated by the Schindler Gruppe, a family-owned holding that has multiple interests in health care. The total cost of the renovation work was EUR 18 million and this year, the clinic pumped a further EUR 300,000 in new medical

equipment. Over 25,000 patients come for treatment each year. Of these, around 2,100 are in-patients staying on average 2.1 days. 95% of patients are from the Berlin area and insured in the compulsory state scheme. Only a small proportion of patients are privately insured. The clinic employs 70 people including 18 doctors and 35 nurses. Income for 2004 was EUR eight million in 2004 and the clinic has no problem keeping its appointment calendar filled. Nevertheless, the clinic is planning to expand its area of activity and in 2007 intends to introduce cosmetic surgery to its portfolio. The operations it intends to offer include eye bag reduction and eyelid lifting procedures that will build on its current expertise. "There is a strong demand from the public for these procedures and a desire to have them done in a reputed clinic. We will be offering safe and tested operations, which, although only cosmetic, nevertheless will improve the quality of life of the patients," says Mr. Schüler. In the same way that by preserving the sight of an elderly person, the clinic is also preserving their independence, so the improvement of a person's appearance helps them preserve or regain their self-confidence. In both cases Augenkl. Berlin Marzahn is providing a vital service to the community it serves. ■

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