

## Whitney Sambhariya Personal Statement

Each adventure starts with modest beginnings. To me, a fulfilled life bursts with adventure. One of my favorite adventures has been scuba diving. There is a certain calmness to being a hundred feet deep in the sea; it sharpens the senses amongst the cacophony of everyday living. Seeing a vibrant coral or camouflaged octopus brings to life the value of vision. However, all divers respect the fragility of vision underwater. A simple scopolamine patch can quickly cause blurred vision and interfere with the ability to read a dive computer; a beautiful situation can easily turn into a dangerous one. For me, these experiences established my interest in eyesight. Throughout residency I have learned clinical knowledge, surgical techniques, and technological advances in ophthalmology, and I am hopeful that a career in academic medicine as a physician-scientist will be my next great adventure. I believe that by becoming a physician-scientist in academia, I will be able to contribute to biomedical research that will advance medical knowledge.

Throughout the years I have seen ophthalmology's depth and breadth. I learned *in vivo* confocal microscopy to scan patients' corneas and evaluate causes of infection. I watched physicians and went on myself to diagnose acanthamoeba and fungal infections early enough to salvage a patient's vision. I observed and learned the finesse of executing delicate surgeries such as corneal transplants from my mentors. I developed a desire to be a part of this well-balanced field that spans ages, populations, and demographics to combine knowledge and skills, ultimately preserving and restoring people's vision.

Originally a traditional four-year medical student, I decided to take a research year to investigate my interest in corneal epithelial homeostasis. After one year, the completion of one project led to new mysteries waiting to be solved in dry eye disease. I recognized how my passion for innovation complemented my interest in patient care, and I elected to transfer into the medical scientist training program (M.D./Ph.D.) to further develop my skills. This journey solidified my desire to pursue a career as a physician-scientist, taking part in developments at the forefront of ophthalmology. My steadfast dedication to both medicine and science led me down the path of a physician-scientist. I began my career through completing the Medical Scientist Training Program (MD/PhD) at UT Southwestern and I am now an ophthalmology resident at the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins Hospital and participate in the PSTP program.

In addition, my academic studies and commitment to clinical training during residency, I have continued my journey of learning by completing the Health System Sciences Distinction track, working in the PSTP program, participating in basic science research, and writing multiple articles. I aim to pursue a cornea/anterior segment fellowship program and have worked to be productive in contributing to the anterior segment literature with articles such as "Impact of Corneal Punctate Epithelial Staining on Patient Satisfaction After Cataract Surgery: An Area of Unmet Need for Clinical Guidance" published in *Cornea*, "Ocular manifestations of SREBF1-associated hereditary mucoepithelial dysplasia" in *JAAPOS*, and authored a textbook chapter on Corneal Topography in *Refractive Surgery* by Carlos Enrique De La Torre González. I have also published additional basic science first-author papers in *J Biol Chem*, *FASEB*, *Cells*, *IOVS*, *Frontiers in Endocrinology*, *PLoS One*, and *Eye and Contact Lens*. I am always eager to learn new knowledge and have been the PI on multiple grants including an NIH F30, Johns Hopkins PSTP grant, Lions Foundation for Sight, AAO Green Grant, and Eye Banking Association of America. I understand the importance of productivity in the laboratory and have already presented at many conferences during my residency. I also recognize the importance of advocacy in ophthalmology and have been active in policy work and legislation, and served as the ARVO Advocacy and Outreach chair this year initiating the "50 States 50 Stories" initiative. For this work I was fortunate to be awarded the ASCRS Resident Excellence award and MSEPS Resident Advocate award.

Overall, these activities demonstrate my passion for and diligent participation in medicine and research at the university, state, and national levels. I am now working with Dr. Soiberman at the Wilmer Eye Institute and plan to apply for a NIH K grant during fellowship to transition to a physician-scientist role. I aspire to remain in academia and begin my own laboratory focusing on corneal cell and molecular biology. I am dedicated to the future of research, and I hope that it is demonstrated through my track record of research, leadership, and advocacy, because when I find something, I am passionate about, I never give up in that pursuit.

Ultimately, I hope to contribute to the ophthalmology and vision science community through basic scientific discovery and translational research. My motivation to help patients and push the boundaries of medicine will fulfill my goal to become a successful physician-scientist in ophthalmology. My ophthalmology adventure started with a collection of simple steps. I hope to bring my spirit of curiosity, work ethic, and passion for service to the residency I may have the privilege to be a part of in the next chapter of my adventure.