

April 24, 2026

Society of Heed Fellows Trustees
Heed Ophthalmic Foundation
655 Beach Street
San Francisco, CA 94109

RE: Nomination of Ailin Song, MD, MHSc for the 2026 Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat

Dear Trustees:

It is my distinct privilege to nominate Dr. Ailin Song for participation in the 20th Annual Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat. Dr. Song is an outstanding resident at Duke University and embodies the clinician-scientist ideal that this Retreat is designed to cultivate, and I am confident she will make the most of the opportunity. I wish to highlight some key areas that exemplify Dr. Song's fit for the Residents Retreat.

1. Scholarly productivity. Even at this early stage of her career, Dr. Song has compiled a publication record that would distinguish many junior faculty members. She has authored 22 peer-reviewed publications, 13 of them as first author—a degree of productivity and scholarly independence that is rare among residents. Her work reflects not only volume but intellectual rigor, and she has consistently chosen research questions with genuine clinical relevance to patients with eye disease.

2. Research funding. Dr. Song's ability to articulate a compelling research program has been recognized through competitive external and internal awards at each stage of her training. As a medical student, she was awarded the Research to Prevent Blindness Medical Student Eye Research Fellowship and the Duke Eye Center Research to Prevent Blindness Small Pilot Research Award. She also secured a CTSA TL1 Pre-Doctoral Scholarship, which supported her concurrent Master of Health Sciences in Clinical Research. Taken together, these awards reflect both the quality of her science and her deliberate, long-term commitment to becoming a rigorously trained clinical investigator.



3. Honors and recognition. Dr. Song's research has been recognized repeatedly at both the institutional and national level. She has received travel grants from the ARVO Foundation in two separate years, the Best Research Presentation Award and the Machemer Research Award from the Duke University Department of Ophthalmology, and the ASCRS Resident Excellence Award. These awards demonstrate repeated recognition of her promise as a developing clinician-scientist and highlight her excellent fit for the Residents Retreat.

4. Career vision. Dr. Song has articulated a clear and unique vision for her career as a clinician-scientist in comprehensive ophthalmology with a research focus in ophthalmic data science. This is an area of growing importance to our field: large-scale electronic health record data, real-world evidence studies, and artificial intelligence are increasingly central to how we generate evidence and improve care delivery. Her Master of Science in Clinical Research degree and her clinical grounding in comprehensive ophthalmology position her uniquely to make substantive contributions at this intersection.

Overall, what distinguishes Dr. Song as a candidate for the Heed Residents Retreat is not only her productivity but her intentionality. She has sought out mentorship, pursued formal research training, and accumulated the methodological skills that a successful academic career demands—all while excelling clinically. The Retreat's emphasis on mentorship, networking with early-career faculty, and practical guidance on the transition from trainee to academician is exactly what will help her translate her considerable promise into a durable, impactful academic career. I have every expectation that she will go on to a highly distinguished academic career, and I believe participation in this Retreat will help to catalyze that trajectory. Please do not hesitate to contact me if additional information would be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pratap Challa".

Pratap Challa, MD
Professor of Ophthalmology
Residency Program Director