

Heed Fellowship Personal Statement

Growing up, asking questions such as, “Why do I get hiccups?” would invite lectures my parents, who were former physicians in China. They would find old receipts and draw out the diaphragm at the kitchen table, answering my questions and more. These memories instilled in me the value of curiosity, the power of knowledge, and the importance of health. These principles carried me through Princeton University where I spent time researching how one’s environment interacts with their genetics to impact wellbeing. These same principles led to my work at Massachusetts General Hospital as a clinical research coordinator after graduation.

Around this time, my grandmother and great-aunt who helped raise me in Guangzhou both developed cataracts, but only my grandmother was able to overcome her fear of surgery. I saw the impact restored vision had on my grandmother’s life as well as the difficulties that accumulated for my great-aunt as she lost her sight. Once again, experiences with my family led my way, as I found myself pulled to ophthalmology and procedural interventions. At Northwestern, I was fortunate to find the mentorship of Dr. Angelo Tanna and pursue glaucoma research focused on optimizing surgical outcomes, including investigation of a novel bioresorbable hydrogel. Similarly, I have had the great opportunity to work with Dr. Jonathan Myers and Dr. Dilru Amarasekera at Wills Eye Hospital during residency to lead a prospective clinical trial to investigate the efficacy of combining iDose and iStent in uncontrolled open angle glaucoma as a safer alternative to traditional filtering surgery.

These experiences have shaped how I aspire to become a physician-scientist, balancing the privilege of caring for patients in the clinic and operating room with exploring and contributing knowledge to advance treatments through research. I plan to pursue a fellowship in glaucoma and work in an academic space where collaboration is at the heart of progress. My time working with professors in biomaterials at Northwestern and discussions with Glaukos representatives to design a clinical study with talented Wills faculty members highlight how I see my future working in an environment where these interactions are possible on a larger scale.

Finally, I would love to pursue teaching in my career. As a first-generation immigrant, I am aware I would not be where I am without the support of a village, from my parents to the incredible mentors I have had in ophthalmology. Recognizing their impact, I have been enthusiastic to pay it forward, serving as a mentor and leading suturing workshops to students of underrepresented, first-generation, and low-income backgrounds at Northwestern to teaching classes to rotating medical students in residency. I aim to one day serve as a director of medical student education or fellowship director, to support students as others have done for me. It would be an honor to be considered for the Heed fellowship and learn firsthand from leaders in these roles.