

Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Resident Retreat

April 28, 2026

Dear Heed Fellowship Selection Committee,

I am writing to offer my strongest possible recommendation for Dr. Ashley Zhou for the 20th Annual Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat. As an ophthalmology resident at Mayo Clinic with exceptional clinical acumen, scholarly productivity, and a deeply rooted commitment to academic medicine, Dr. Zhou represents exactly the kind of future leader this program is designed to foster and mentor into her academic career.

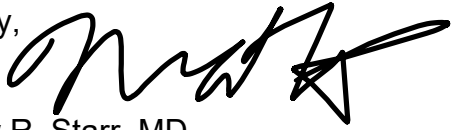
Dr. Zhou's trajectory in ophthalmology, and specifically vitreoretinal surgery, has been destined for some time now. From her early foundation in retinal neurobiology at Duke University to her impactful clinical research at Johns Hopkins, she consistently demonstrates the ability to bridge rigorous scientific inquiry with meaningful clinical application. Her work has spanned outcomes research, health disparities, and large-scale data analysis, culminating in multiple peer-reviewed publications and national presentations in well-respected journals and meetings.

Now as a resident at Mayo Clinic, Dr. Zhou continues to excel as both a clinician and investigator. I can speak to her strong clinical skills, going above and beyond in the clinic and operating room, far exceeding the surgical skills of her peers and is well on her way to a successful vitreoretinal surgery career. From a research standpoint, her current research on intraocular inflammation following intravitreal injections exemplifies her commitment to clinically driven, outcomes-based research that directly improves patient care. Similarly, her work examining litigation outcomes following retinal detachment repair reflects a broader interest in patient safety and systems-level improvement, highlighting both her intellectual curiosity and her maturity in thinking beyond individual cases.

Equally impressive is Dr. Zhou's dedication to mentorship, service, and leadership. She has taken on meaningful roles ranging from co-founding national vision screening initiatives to leading community-based eye care efforts, and she continues to mentor junior trainees and medical students. She is developing a strong academic pedigree with a host of strong mentors from various institutions that will suit her well as a strong mentor for the future generation of ophthalmologists. The Heed Resident Retreat would provide an ideal environment for Dr. Zhou to further develop as an academic ophthalmologist. She is eager to learn from leaders in the field, engage with like-minded peers, and refine her path as a future vitreoretinal surgeon-scientist. I am confident she will both benefit from and meaningfully contribute to this experience.

In summary, Dr. Ashley Zhou is an outstanding resident, an emerging leader in academic ophthalmology, and an individual of exceptional integrity and drive. I give her my highest recommendation without reservation. Please reach out with any questions via email: starr.matthew2@mayo.edu or text: 405 834 8354

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Starr', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matthew R. Starr, MD
Residency Program Director
Associate Professor of Ophthalmology
Mayo Clinic