

My path to ophthalmology was nontraditional. It began with an unexpected invitation to join a research lab nestled in the redwood forests of California, followed by a move across the country where I discovered the excitement of retinopathy research under the guidance of mentors who nurtured my intellectual curiosity, and culminated in my acceptance to medical school and eventual matriculation into Ophthalmology residency. This journey, though winding, provided me with the steadfast resolve to pursue a retina fellowship and incorporate research and mentorship into my career.

My first exposure to research was at UCSC, where my outward enthusiasm for biochemistry resulted in an invitation to join a structural biology lab. My project allowed me to play a critical role in discovering the active structure of CDK4-cyclin D1-p27, a complex which had evaded elucidation for nearly a decade. Applying concepts from my coursework to the advancement of scientific knowledge was invigorating. After graduation, I immersed myself in full-time research while preparing my medical school application. It was by pure happenstance that I was introduced to a retinopathy project, which was my first exposure to ophthalmology. This fascinating research inspired me to shadow a vitreoretinal surgeon, where I discovered that the clinical side of ophthalmology was just as captivating as the research.

I pursued further retina research in the labs of Drs. William and Ruth Caldwell, where my investigative skills continued to grow. At this point, I had two years of research experience. Though I was technically adept at performing a substantial array of experiments, I had never before had mentors who fostered my intellectual curiosity and autonomy. The Caldwells' patience, consistent encouragement, and teaching created an environment where my confidence to formulate sound hypotheses, design and conduct experiments, analyze my results, and share my work with others blossomed. I enjoyed working with the Caldwells so much that I continued my research as a paid employee in their lab during medical school. This was my first glimpse into what blending a career as a clinician-scientist might be like.

During residency, my focus has necessarily shifted towards my clinical and surgical training. My love for research, however, has persisted. I am currently working on three retrospective studies that are near completion with Retina Consultants of Alabama and am in the process of writing up several case reports. Additionally, I have now taken on a new role in a research capacity, that of a mentor. I have several medical students that I have been actively mentoring through research, one of whom will be presenting our project at ARVO this May.

My passion for retina and research has remained resolute and I look forward to applying for retina fellowship this year. The inspiration and mentorship from the Caldwells was integral in my decision to continue research throughout my career and has inspired me to mentor others in the same fashion. If selected, hope to further my development as a clinician-scientist through the Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat.