Department of Ophthalmology
and Visual Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

April 28, 2026

To the Society of Heed Fellows,

It is our distinct pleasure to offer our highest recommendation to Dr. Claire Hermsen for participation in the Annual Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Residents Retreat. As a resident at the University of Wisconsin Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, Dr. Hermsen has consistently demonstrated exceptional promise, effortlessly balancing clinical excellence, service to the residency program, and medical education. Currently finishing her PGY-3 year, Dr. Hermsen has committed to a career in academic ophthalmology with subspecialty interests in pediatrics and pathology.

Dr. Hermsen's interest in academic medicine is deeply rooted in a desire to ground clinical practice in the underlying mechanisms of disease. She describes her passion for ocular pathology as a means of bridging her cellular-level scientific training with her day-to-day patient care. This scholarly approach is clear in her growing research portfolio. Among her recent accomplishments is a completed project with Dr. Kim Stepien examining mutations in the gene encoding the cone-rod homeobox transcription factor, CRX, which affects photoreceptors in conditions such as Leber congenital amaurosis, retinitis pigmentosa, and autosomal dominant cone-rod dystrophies—disorders that can manifest from birth to the sixth decade of life.

Dr. Hermsen hypothesized that mutations in the CRX gene will have wide phenotypic variability, including variability in symptom onset and disease progression. Her case series comprehensively characterized patients by age of onset, presenting ocular symptoms, visual acuity, dilated fundus examination findings, imaging findings (i.e., fundus autofluorescence), ERG results, genetic testing outcomes, and disease course. Dr. Hermsen presented this work at the 2025 Wisconsin Ophthalmology Research Day, Madison, WI, and at the 2025 Women in Ophthalmology Conference, Amelia Island, FL, and a manuscript is currently in preparation.

Following her interests in inherited retinal degenerations, Dr. Hermsen is now working with Dr. Stepien on a related project investigating KCNV2- associated retinopathy using adaptive optics scanning laser ophthalmoscopy. KCNV2 encodes for a voltage-gated potassium channel critical for photoreceptor membrane potential modulation. Importantly, this condition has been the focus of an AAV-mediated gene therapy that recently demonstrated efficacy in a mouse model. Prior work using adaptive optics has shown cone photoreceptor structural disruption in affected patients. The patients that Dr. Hermsen identified for her project will meaningfully add to the knowledge about the structural characteristics for this rare condition and may inform the utility of future gene therapy.

Perhaps most impressive is Dr. Hermsen's natural talent and enthusiasm for teaching. She approaches education not as a requirement, but as a core component of her professional identity. She is a dedicated educator who is always the first to volunteer for medical student surgical teaching fairs, small-group case-based learning sessions, slit lamp workshops, and professional advising. Her pedagogical impact extends beyond ophthalmology; she has delivered lectures to emergency department nursing staff on triaging eye emergencies and has provided hands-on skills training for emergency medicine residents and physician assistants. Having experienced the profound impact of mentorship herself, she is now deeply invested in passing along the knowledge she has gained during her residency training.

2828 Marshall Ct. Ste. 200 Madison, WI 53705 608/263-4758 FAX 608/263-1466

Dr. Hermsen's outstanding clinical and surgical aptitude, combined with her dedication to training the next generation of ophthalmologists, makes her an ideal candidate for this retreat. She is already a respected leader within her residency program, serving as a Resident Wellness Committee Member, Resident Coordinator for the Botox clinic, and our elected Chief Resident for 2026-2027. We are confident she will bring that same leadership and collaborative spirit to the Heed Residents Retreat.

We offer Dr. Hermsen our highest recommendation for this opportunity, which will help prepare her for a successful career as an academic pediatric ophthalmologist. We are very hopeful that she will consider staying on with our department as faculty. Please feel free to contact us if you would like additional information.

Please note that our department has nominated two outstanding residents this year, if both are accepted, we would be delighted to fund the second resident.

Sincerely,

Terri L. Young, MD, MBA
Peter A. Duehr Endowed Professor of Ophthalmology, Pediatrics, and Medical Genetics
Chair, University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences

Anna Momont, MD
Associate Professor
Residency Program Director
University of Wisconsin Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences