

It seems fitting that my interest in medicine began with a microscope, as my 10-year old self peered through the eyepiece at gram-stained bacteria. My career path continued in ophthalmology with a microscope of a different kind: staining with fluorescein instead of crystal violet, examining cornea instead of cell walls. What has remained constant, however, is an eagerness for discovery that guided me first to the guaranteed BS/MD program at the University of Illinois at Chicago for my undergraduate studies, followed by a merit scholarship to attend Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine. Currently, I am a resident at the Vanderbilt Eye Institute and will be pursuing a fellowship in vitreoretinal surgery.

My research experiences have borne several themes related to systemic connections and imaging analysis: through my exposure to pediatric retina under the mentorship of Dr. Michael Shapiro and Dr. Safa Rahmani, investigating systemic outcomes of bevacizumab treatment for ROP helped improve my understanding of how factors that affect the eye influence the body. On the adult side, I also authored a study on imaging biomarkers of microvascular changes in the retina of patients with carotid stenosis - yet another connection between systemic disease and ocular manifestations. That was also my foray into multimodal retinal imaging, where I published on and currently study autofluorescence and OCT imaging biomarkers for retinal detachments with Dr. Avni Finn. In keeping with my connection to systemic factors and eye outcomes, we also authored a review article on GLP-1 receptor agonists and associations with the eye. Throughout my educational path, my immersion in these research endeavors has continued to develop my passion for the retina, a structure both infinitely intricate and concretely approachable.

Of course, academic inquiry is never performed in isolation; only by engaging with the research community at large can new ideas flourish. Presenting my work at conferences and learning from peers and colleagues continually inspire further directions for my research. Though I am still early in my career, I have already begun to give back to the scientific community by serving as a peer reviewer for JVRD.

In addition to advancing the field, I seek to uplift those who come after me through mentorship and education. I was recently selected as an AAO BCSC content reviewer, tasked with improving the study resource that is so central to our resident education and curriculum. On a more personal scale, I teach and guide junior residents on call and share resources, including Anki flashcard decks that I have made from educational materials.

The Heed Resident Retreat would be a tremendous honor and opportunity to learn from experienced mentors in the world of academic ophthalmology. It would also represent an important step on my path toward an academic retina career focused on advancing clinical research, multimodal imaging studies, and systemic-eye understanding. Finally, through my own experiences with generous mentorship, I aim to become a better mentor and guide to the next generation of ophthalmologists.