Personal Statement for the Heed Ophthalmic Foundation Fellowship 2026

My research interests began in childhood with an intense curiosity about the natural world. They first materialized as an undergraduate student working in drug discovery and innovation with Dr. Jim Leahy, where we aimed to optimize the efficacy and delivery of antimicrobials by modifying the molecular structure of known bioactive compounds. My thirst for research continued in medical school, where I discovered a passion for medical education and published on the benefits of peer-assisted learning in optimizing the medical school learning environment. I also took an additional year dedicated to clinical research, during which I worked with Dr. Guillermo Amescua and Dr. Audina Berrocal. With Dr. Amescua, I studied and published on various aspects of complex infectious keratitis, ocular graft-versus-host disease, immunobullous ocular surface diseases, and the management of complex limbal stem cell deficiency. With Dr. Berrocal, I developed an interest in retina and focused my studies on pediatric retinal diseases, their detection, and their manifestations on novel imaging techniques. With Dr. Berrocal, I also published potentially guideline-changing results on the retinal complications of different modes of obstetric delivery. I have worked with other mentors in ophthalmology to advance understanding of corneal, glaucomatous, and retinal diseases, including assessing types of neovascularization in diabetic retinopathy using the latest imaging technologies. I continue to engage in clinical research to address some of the many unanswered questions that make ophthalmology a field of continual advancement, yet always focused on improving patients' vision and quality of life. I look forward to a fellowship in vitreoretinal diseases and deeply believe the Heed Fellowship will allow me to continue important research that impacts the lives of our communities.

Looking ahead, I am eager to pursue an academic career that merges my passion for medical education with my drive to investigate meaningful clinical questions. My interests include uveitic diseases and inherited retinal disorders, as well as the expanding role of genetic testing in diagnosing and reclassifying retinal disease to better identify therapeutic targets. The rapid evolution in gene therapy for ophthalmic disease represents an extraordinary opportunity to translate discovery into vision-saving treatments, and I am motivated to contribute to this evolving field through both research and teaching.

Piero Carletti, MD

PGY-3 Ophthalmology Resident

Bascom Palmer Eye Institute

Miami, FL