

Spring/Summer Newsletter



Dear Alumni, Friends, and Colleagues:

It is a pleasure for me to provide this spring/summer update on the programs and events in the department.

Trinity is transitioning our web page to an updated version which should be available in the fall. Our [Patient Care Services](#) at Loyola and Hines VA (HVA) have recently expanded in scope and depth with the recruitment of 6 new full-time faculty and 1 part-time faculty in FY 2024. This includes Douglas Sigford, MD (Retina), Ayesha Badar, MD (Glaucoma), Dana Darwish, MD (Comprehensive), Christina “Tina” Mamalis, MD (Cornea), Jigna Joshi (Glaucoma), Jamie Keen (Oculoplastics). Peter Fries, an experienced ASOPRS trained Oculoplastic surgeon, will join the FT faculty in the fall 2024. We are planning to expand our surgical services to include Oakbrook Terrace (Loyola Ambulatory Surgery Center (LASCO) and the Palos Surgery Center.

Our [Education Programs](#) remain strong, with a sustained focus on our medical students ([UME](#)), residents ([GME](#)), and practicing ophthalmologists and optometrists ([CME](#)). We continue to offer one of the finest resident training programs in Chicago and the Midwest with Anuradha Khanna, MD, Vice Chair of Education, leading the way. This past July, we were excited to formally welcome our incoming PGY2 residents at our annual Blue Coat Ceremony: Drs. Kasey Johnson, Patrick Buoniconti, Brian Simon, and Lauren Nakhleh.

Our innovative [Research Programs](#), led by Director Evan Stubbs, PhD, continues to expand with more of our faculty actively participating in local, national, and international clinical / scientific conferences (insert URL), resulting in a record number of peer-reviewed publications (insert URL) and private/local (ISPB, Edward Hines VA Hospital, Loyola University) and national (NIH, Dept. of Veterans Affairs) funding support than ever before. This year’s grant submissions to the ISPB alone resulted in a > 90% success rate, an impressive achievement, netting a record breaking \$47K in direct research support. In addition to receiving funding support, we are thrilled to announce that applicant Maha Khokhar (M1, class of 2027) was additionally selected as this year’s recipient of the Donna Dreiske Award for best medical student grant application for his proposal on the *Antioxidant Effect of XJB-5-131 on Human Corneal Epithelial Cells and Neutrophils*.

We also enjoyed success at the local level, having mentored five STAR applicants (the most the department has ever had in a given year: Trevor Hale, Megan Lee, Varun Shravah, Chandana Sooranahalli, and Julien Stroumza). I am proud to share the news that all five applicants received funding support (100% success rate) for their summer research programs. But wait, that’s not all. Every year we have our PGY4 residents participate in the COS Beem Fisher competition by submitting their research findings in the form of a publication-ready manuscript. This year, we are delighted to announce, once again, success with Dr. Meredith Horacek awarded 3rd place for her peer-reviewed and published work on *Rho Kinase Inhibitors and their Effect on Orbital Preadipocytes* in collaboration with her faculty mentors Drs. Bu and Yoo.

In April a broad national and international team including faculty and residents from 3 Chicago AMCs (Loyola, Northwestern, and Cook County) provided cataract and pterygium surgery at [Nasir Hospital](#) in Guatemala. Faculty and resident members of each of the 6 Chicago AMCs have also organized into the Chica-GO (global

ophthalmology) Program to offer all Chicagoland residents a structured curriculum and the opportunity to present at the annual Global Ophthalmology Summit.
 Finally, I was happy to spend time with Tom Mulligan, Marcus Meyer and Andy Kopstein in Seattle during the ARVO Meeting and look forward to our Chicago AAO reception on Saturday evening October 19 at the Loyola Museum of Art (LUMA) <https://www.luc.edu/luma/index.shtml>

Warmly,

Charles S. Bouchard, MD, MA

The John P. Mulcahy Professor and Chairman
 Department of Ophthalmology

Department Research (Director: Evan Stubbs, PhD)

Academic year 2023/2024 saw more of our faculty actively participating in local, national, and international clinical / scientific conferences, resulting in a record number of peer-reviewed publications and private/local (ISPB, Edward Hines VA Hospital, Loyola University) and national (NIH, Dept. of Veterans Affairs) funding support.

The 2024 ISPB grant cycle alone resulted in a > 90% success rate, resulting in over \$47K direct research support advancing a diverse field of clinical areas including, but not limited to, PTSD, ocular surface disorders including the ever troubling dry eye disease, various retinopathies, malignancies, and of course, my personal favorite primary open angle glaucoma. These small basic and applied research grants enable our medical students, graduate students, and our residents a unique introductory opportunity at advancing the field of ophthalmology through discovery (See list below).

<i>Student</i>	<i>Faculty Mentor</i>	<i>Title of Project</i>
Shaunt Abnous	Ping Bu	The Therapeutic Effect of Probiotic Metabolite MQ on Experimental Dry Eye Mouse Models
Justin Flood	Jhansi Raju	The Association Between Non-infectious Uveitis and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Veterans
Trevor Hale	Charles Bouchard	Assessing the inflammatory immune response of patients with hematopoietic malignancies undergoing chemotherapy and hematopoietic stem cell transplant over time through cytokine and leukocyte analysis
Maha Khokhar	Simon Kaja	Antioxidant Effect of XJB-5-131 on Human Corneal Epithelial Cells and Neutrophils
Ria Ravi	Liang Qiao and Ping Bu	Riluzole protects photoreceptors and retinal pigment epithelial cells from blue light-induced injury in vitro
Varun Shravah	Simon Kaja	Development of an Ex Vivo Choroidal Sprouting Assay from Human Donor Tissue
Chandana Sooranahalli	Omer Iqbal	The potential roles of IL-1beta, IL-6, and HMGB1 in the pathogenesis of Stevens-Johnson Syndrome/Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis
Julien Stroumza	Omer Iqbal	Blood Biomarker Profile in Patients with Diabetic Retinopathy
Stephanie Tan	Omer Iqbal	The Potential Roles of Caspase-1/IL-1 β signaling, HIF-1 α , and VEGF in Blood Samples Collected from Patients with Obstructive Sleep Apnea - Implications in the Pathogenesis of Diabetic Retinopathy
Troughton, Lee	Simon Kaja	Investigating the contribution of paxillin to primary open angle glaucoma pathogenesis

Our faculty also continue to generously volunteer their time by serving as mentors to first year medical students by helping them conceive and develop STAR research projects. This year we tried something new and teamed up with the *Loyola Ophthalmology Interest Group* and co-hosted an open house where first year medical students were able to meet and discuss research opportunities first hand with our research faculty. The open house was a resounding success, resulting in a bumper crop of medical students interested in participating in many of our ophthalmology research programs. In total, five students paired up with research mentors which culminated in the preparation, submission, and funding of all five STAR applications (100% success rate) used to cover living expenses for this 8-week didactic summer research program. As an extension of our research program, the *Department of Ophthalmology* is also fortunate to be able to offer these STAR awardees the opportunity to compete for one of three \$10,000 Louis M. Zale Academic Scholarships to be used for debt reduction throughout their medical school tenure. We are pleased to announce that the 2024 Zale Scholarship recipients are Trevor Hale, Varun Shravah, and Julien Stroumza.

Every year the Chicago Ophthalmology Society hosts a Beem Fisher competition where ophthalmology residents at all career stages (PGY2, PGY3, or PGY4) are invited to submit their original research findings in the form of a peer-review competent manuscript. Out of the 72 ophthalmology residents currently undergoing training at one of the 6 contributing Chicago programs, approximately a dozen submit manuscripts for review. This year, we are delighted to announce, once again, success with Dr. Meredith Horacek awarded 3rd place for her peer-reviewed and published work on Rho Kinase inhibitors and their effect on orbital preadipocytes in collaboration with her faculty mentors Drs. Bu and Yoo.

Lastly, we will leave you with some photos of our time at the 2024 ARVO Meeting this past May which was held out west in Seattle where the Department of Ophthalmology faculty contributed to the success of this international conference by presenting a record 20 poster/podium presentations!



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1. Faculty, international guests, residents and medical students at our annual ARVO Dinner.
2. Alexis Stafaniak, (PGY3), Kavya Jatavallabhula (MS3), Paul de Bustros (PGY4), Max Whitmeyer (PGY3)
3. Anjali Ferris (MS4), Sarah Tajran (MS3), Charles Bouchard.
4. Podium Presentations: Rachel Mazurek (grad student) (l) with her mentor, Abby Kroken, PhD (r) and Vidya Rao, PhD.

To learn more about department research, visit the website to see the department **2024 Publications:**
<https://ssom.luc.edu/ophtha/research/publicationspresentations/>

Clinical Faculty Update (James McDonnell, MD)



Jigna Joshi, MD assumed the position of Section Chief at HVA in the spring 2014 where she also has an appointment as Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology at Loyola. From 2016 to the present, Jigna served as Associate Chief of Surgery for Eye Care, West Palm Beach VA Medical Center. Jigna was an AOA graduate of University of Illinois College of Medicine, and completed her internship at our very own MacNeal Hospital and then her residency at Northwestern. She trained as a Glaucoma Fellow at Yale University. As a Chicago native, we are pleased to welcome her back home!



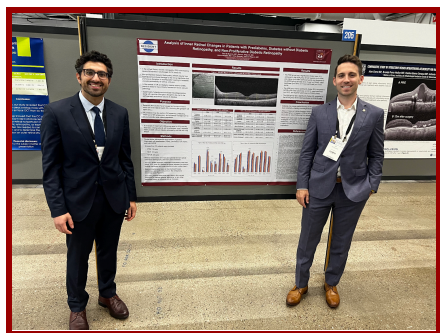
Peter Fries will join the Department of Ophthalmology in the fall 2024. A native of Chicago, Peter was a cum laude graduate of Loyola University with a BA in Chemistry and then obtained his MD degree from The University of Health Sciences/The Chicago Medical School. He then completed his Residency and internship in general surgery at Letterman Army Medical Center in San Francisco, CA where he earned the Col. Robert Skelton Award as top Resident. He completed 2 fellowships, one in Ocular Oncology at the University of California, San Francisco and a 2nd Fellowship in Eye Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at University of Pennsylvania, PA. Peter will serve as Director of the Oculoplastics Service at Loyola and also care for patients at HVA. Welcome aboard Peter!



Eileen Gable completed her Master of Divinity (MDiv) program where she graduated summa cum laude and received the Divinity Achievement Award for Outstanding Achievement Student of the Year. Congratulations Eileen.



James McDonnell led a group of 2 residents, Meriam Ben Hadj Tahar represented Loyola at the annual AAO Mid Year Forum in Washington DC in April. Meriam met with policymakers and participated in discussions on Capitol Hill.



JD Wilgucki, MD and Paul de Bustros presented their work at the Annual ASRS Meeting in Sweden in July 2024. The title of their poster was “ Analysis of Preretinal Changes in Patients with Prediabetes, Diabetes without Diabetic Retinopathy and Non-Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy”. Congratulations.

Faculty Transitions:

- Taylor Starnes, MD will be leaving the HVA in September to join Jesse Brown VA. Thank you for all your mentorship and teaching of residents and medical students, your clinical expertise in Cornea and Ocular Surface and your collegiality as a member of the department
- Steve Watson, MD will be leaving the HVA in August to serve as Section Chief of Jesse Brown VA. Congratulations on this new leadership position.
- Jhansi Raju, MD transitioned from Section Chief at HVA to assume responsibility for the VA Telemedicine programs in Arizona, New MEXico and Southern California. She remains active as the Director of our Health Data Science program and continues to teach professional Development to residents and run QI programs at HVA.
- David Yoo, MD joined Been Facial Plastics in Geneva where he provides oculoplastics, cosmetic and reconstructive surgery. He continues to see patients at HVA as well.

Graduate Medical Education (GME): Roshni Vasaiwala, MD)

The Loyola Ophthalmology family has certainly grown a lot this spring.



PGY-4 resident Meredith Horacek and her husband Sean welcomed their daughter, Hallie, into their family this past March.

PGY-4 resident Nileema Patel and her husband Ronak welcomed their son, Rohan, into their family in April.

PGY-4 resident Briggs Hoyt and his wife Casey welcomed baby Briggs into their family this May.

Loyola Ophthalmology Class of 2024 Graduation

Loyola Ophthalmology Residency Class of 2024 had their graduation ceremony on Saturday, June 8, 2024 at Hilton Oak Brook Hills. Our 4 graduating residents, Dr. Meredith Horacek, Dr. Briggs Hoyt, Dr. Nileema Patel, and Dr. Elisabeth Sledz, were honored and celebrated along with their families, co-residents, and faculty. We wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors.



Kimberly Estes, MD, Loyola Ophthalmology class of 2019, was awarded Educator of the Year 2024 by the residency program for her excellence and passion for teaching at Hines VA Medical Center.



Future Plans of Our Graduates

Nileema will be moving to Atlanta with her family to start an Anterior Segment Surgery fellowship at Woolfson Eye Institute.

Briggs will be starting his Glaucoma Fellowship at University of California San Diego.

Elisabeth will be pursuing Oculoplastics Fellowship at University of Texas San Antonio.

Meredith will be taking some time off to spend with her baby daughter and then will pursue a career in Comprehensive Ophthalmology.

Looking forward to academic year 2024-2025!



We are excited to welcome our incoming chief residents, Dr. Paul DeBustros and Dr. Suzanne Kirk, onto the education leadership team for the academic year 2024-25!



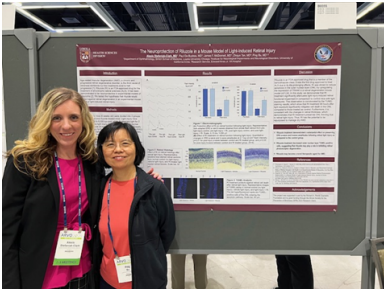
Our incoming PGY-2 class started ophthalmology orientation on Thursday June 28. They were officially welcomed into our program on Wednesday, July 24 at our annual Blue Coat Ceremony. Welcome aboard!

Front Row: Brian Simon, Kasey Johnson, Patrick Buoniconti, Lauren Nakhleh.

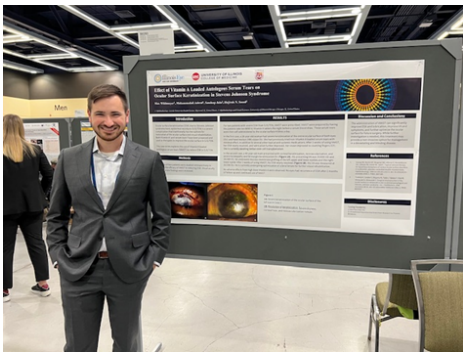
Awards and Presentations

In May 2024, Dr. Meredith Horacek received the 3rd place Beem Fisher Award for her research project “The Effect of Rho Kinase Inhibitors on In-vitro Human Orbital Preadipocytes”

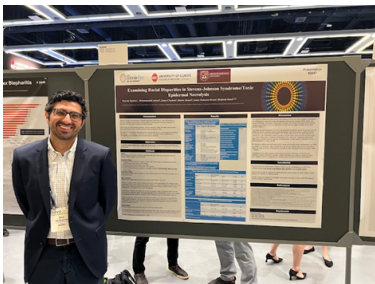
Several of our residents presented at the annual ARVO meeting in May in Seattle.



Alexis Stefaniak-Clark (PGY3) with Ping Bu, MD: “The Neuroprotection of Riluzole in a Mouse Model of Light-Induced Retinal Injury”



Max Whitmeyer, PGY3: “Effect of Vitamin A Loaded Autologous Serum Tears on ocular surface keratinization in Stevens Johnson Syndrome”



Paul de Bustros, PGY4: “Examining Racial Disparities in Stevens-Johnson Syndrome/Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis”

CME Education Programs (Meenakshi Chaku, MD)

Our CME programs continue to be strong as we invite the very best speakers whose academic careers focus on innovative and impactful topics.

Vision Research Day



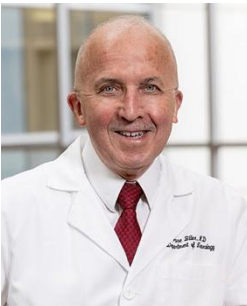
This year's Vision Research Day gathered a Neuro-ophthalmologist, a Retina surgeon and a Neurologist to address challenging topics in Neurovascular and Neurodegenerative Disease.



Sharon Fekrat, MD, Duke Ophthalmology posed the question “Is Multimodal retinal imaging really the answer for identification of neurodegenerative disease? “



Emory Alumnus JD Wilgucki, MD with Emory Guest speaker Valerie Biousse who sounded the alarm about “Diagnosis and management of acute retinal ischemia: Time for change! “



Finally, Jose Biller, MD, FACP, FAAN, FANA, FAHA engaged the audience through a “Game of Strokes for the Ophthalmologist”. Felipe de Alba led a panel discussion with the guest speakers as well as invited subspecialty panelists Matt McCumber, MD, Jorge Khatan and Patty Davis.

Faculty Alumni Day



This Year's Faculty Alumni Day assembled leaders in AI, Retina Disease and Pediatric Ophthalmology to provide a lively, informative and behavior changing series of presentations.

- Ray Areaux, Distinguished Alumni Speaker, University of Minnesota
- Dimitri Azar, MD, MBA, University of Illinois, Twenty/Twenty
- Janet Davis, MD, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute





Near Future CME Events (see attached Annual Calendar)

- 10th Annual Stevens Johnson Syndrome Symposium: Wednesday, Aug 21.
- Annual Glaucoma-Cataract Summit with Wet Lab: Saturday, September 14.
- Biannual DEI Speaker Series: Keith Carter, MD, U Iowa Wednesday, November 20

Patient Care (JD Wilgucki, MD)

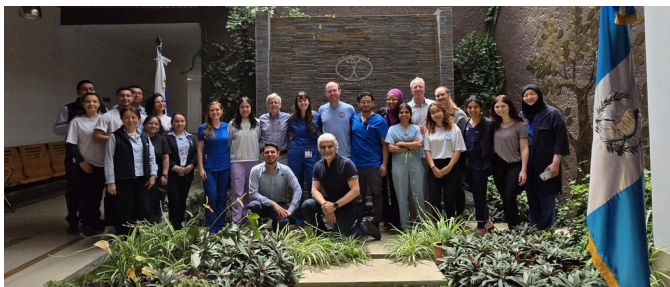
We welcome Shannon Cermak, our new VP Ambulatory to help lead our Ophthalmology Services into the future. Shannon was previously at Rush University where she led outpatient services. Welcome aboard Shannon.



Our Outpatient Surgery Services will expand from Loyola ASC and Palos Surgicenter to include LASCO at Oakbrook Terrace. This will help grow our surgical volumes in the future. We are also planning an expansion at Hickory Hills to have 2 providers there at the same time.

Global Eye Health Programs (Charles Bouchard)

Our Global Eye Health Operations had a milestone in April where a 14 member team provided cataract and Pterygium surgery to those in Need at Nasir Hospital. 7 members of the team traveled from Chicago and included Shweta Choudhry, MD (Cook County, HVA), her PGY 3 Resident Umangi Patel, Tom Mulligan (Loyola ALumni 1994), his daughter, OR Ophthalmology Technician Kylie Mulligan and her friend Rae Tegman, another OR technician and Bill Myers, from Northwestern.



With the purchase of a new Alcon Centurion and Revalia microscope, the program is poised for growth.



We also had an academic evening with 3 resident presentations (Munazzah Chou (London, UK), Paula Dmetriev (Wills Eye Hospital) and Umangi Patel (Cook County). Paula and Munazzah also organized a Jeopardy game for all staff and faculty and residents at the event. We certainly had a strong Women in Ophthalmic Presence!



Over the last 6-9 months, faculty and residents from all 6 Chicago programs have gathered to create a Chica-GO (Global Ophthalmology) program to offer a GO curriculum, international service opportunity, and participation in the Global Ophthalmology Summit, this year in Portland OR Aug 9-11. We will have 4 posters from the April Mission team and Loyola residents.

Alumni Affairs (James McDonnell)

We are all saddened by the recent passing of Jared Nielsen class of 2005. After graduating as Chief Resident at Loyola Jared completed his vitreoretinal fellowship at Northwestern University where he remained a Clinical Instructor until he joined the Wolfe Eye Clinic in 2007. A life-long learner, Jared completed an MBA from the University of Iowa Tippie College of Business in 2018. As the Wolfe Clinic's director of Retina Clinical Trials he served as a Principal Investigator in over 50 clinical trials. He was engaged as an investigator in the DRCR Retina Network. Dr. Nielsen was also an author of more than 20 papers, a reviewer for peer-reviewed retina journals and presented at major meetings throughout the world. He was passionate about medical education and began and served as the Program Director for the Wolfe Clinic's Retina Fellowship. Jared cherished the remarkable friendships and professional peers who collaborated with him to advance their field. We were lucky to have him as a resident, friend and colleague.



LTR Charles Bouchard, Tarra Grille Nielsen, Zachary Nielsen, Hillary Nielsen, Owen Nielsen, and 2005 classmates Rukhsana Mirza and Christina Daleany attended the funeral and celebration of life of Jared Nielsen on Saturday June 22.