

Bascom Palmer Eye Institute | University of Miami Health System



Images

UHEALTH
VOLUME XXXIX
ISSUE 1

FEBRUARY 2021

Innovative
Vision Research

Leadership
in Action

New Diagnostic Tools
and Therapies

Bascom Palmer Eye Institute's mission is to enhance the quality of life by improving sight, preventing blindness, and advancing ophthalmic knowledge through compassionate patient care and innovative vision research.

FEATURE

Advancing the Frontiers of Ophthalmology

Focus on Vision Research 2

Innovation and Invention 12

CLINICAL EXPERTISE

Saving Lives – Saving Vision 14

On the Surface 18

MEDICAL EDUCATION

Passing the Baton 22

BASCOM PALMER EXCELLENCE

Awards and Honors 27

Welcome New Faculty 30

Profiles in Philanthropy 32



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Images is produced by Bascom Palmer Eye
Institute with support from the George C.
Brosius Endowment Fund.



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

With the arrival of the new year, the dedicated professionals at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute are turning our vision to the future.

Our scientists and clinicians are working closely together studying the diseases and disorders of the eye, from the ocular surface and cornea to the retina, macula, and optic nerve fibers leading back to the brain. This issue of *Images* highlights their remarkable work in our laboratories on gene therapy, stem cells, and biomechanical devices to name just a few

of their leading-edge scientific programs.

Our far-sighted professionals are also developing advanced technology applications like machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve clinical care. These rapidly evolving tools will also allow our professionals to screen and diagnose vision problems in clinics and remote locations, extending our specialized ophthalmologic services to underserved communities and help address disparities in access to care.

Support for our research comes from a variety of sources, including a robust portfolio of grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as well as other federal and state programs. They help support our laboratory infrastructure and contribute to our ability to keep our studies moving forward, even through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Private philanthropy is another vital source of support for our research, as well as our clinical care and medical education programs. In this issue, you can read about the important contributions of these benefactors to our Institute, including our Ocular Surface Disease Service, which addresses problems like dry eye syndrome, as well as bacterial, fungal and viral infections, tumors, and other diseases.

As we look ahead to 2021, we are all hopeful that widespread adoption of COVID-19 vaccines, coupled with the prudent safeguards recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will lead to a "new normal" for health care. We have learned many lessons from the pandemic about safely delivering high-quality vision care in a variety of settings. That includes the excellent response to our telehealth program from patients and families who can access a Bascom Palmer professional from the comfort of their homes.

You can be assured that Bascom Palmer is committed to leadership in every field of ophthalmology. Thank you deeply for your continued support.



Eduardo C. Alfonso, M.D.
Kathleen and Stanley J. Glaser Chair in Ophthalmology
Director, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute



A Conversation with Bascom Palmer's Director of Scientific Research

New Scientific Discoveries and Improved Clinical Care

For many decades, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute has been a global leader in vision research. In a wide-ranging conversation, Vittorio Porciatti, D.Sc., the James L. Knight Professor in Ophthalmology, vice chair, and director of scientific research, talks about what lies ahead for the dynamic research program.

Q. What is your vision for laboratory research at Bascom Palmer?

Porciatti: Much of our research focuses on improving clinical care through translational (bench to bedside) studies, as well as discovery research to explore new avenues with high clinical potential.

Q. What challenges does vision research at Bascom Palmer face?

Porciatti: We have three major challenges: funding, talent recruitment, and space for our laboratories.

Q. What are the highlights of your tenure as scientific director in the past decade?

Porciatti: I am proud of having facilitated and sustained the accomplishments made by Bascom Palmer's scientists with good administration, with an open door to listen to all their problems, and to search for viable solutions in a friendly environment.

Q. How has vision research changed in the past decade?

Porciatti: We have seen dramatic changes in all fields, leading to significant strategic choices. Focusing on the translational aspects of research has helped us orient our decisions.

Q. What is the size of Bascom Palmer's research portfolio?

Porciatti: Our currently active awards total \$40 million, including \$18 million from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and \$22 million from other sponsors. Federal grants cover indirect costs to help sustain our research infrastructure. We greatly appreciate the vital support from industry, foundations and private philanthropy.

Q. What are your research priorities?

Porciatti: We are promoting high-impact research (gene therapy, stem cell therapy, gene editing therapy), developing new technology (biomaterials, drug delivery, instruments for imaging, electrophysiology, surgery, artificial vision, etc.), generating interdisciplinary collaborations, and using artificial intelligence to take advantage of large data sets.

Q. What is unique about Bascom Palmer's research?

Porciatti: Our key strengths include our excellent reputation, a diverse patient population, and the outstanding quality of faculty and administrative staff.

Q. How has COVID-19 affected Bascom Palmer's research?

Porciatti: COVID-19 has altered the balance between bench and office time. Reduced bench time has slowed progress of ongoing experiments and development of new ideas. On the other hand, increased office time has produced more scientific papers and grant submissions using available data. In the next period we may see a paradoxical increase of scholarly productivity and grant awards that will be followed by a relatively greater reduction. Altogether, there has been a substantial disruption.

Q. Tell us about your own research.

Porciatti: My own research focuses on prevention/restoration of vision in glaucoma and optic neuropathies such as Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON), a genetic condition which leads to sudden loss of central vision. As my research is relevant to other disciplines and pathological conditions, I have a number of interdisciplinary collaborations.

Q. What about your work on diagnosing vision issues?

Porciatti: To test vision, I use a non-invasive electrophysiological tool called PERG (pattern electroretinography) that I have pioneered and continuously developed. It can identify problems with the optic nerve neurons before they die – a critical step in treating LHON to prevent loss of vision.

Q. What are some of the exciting things on the horizon?

Porciatti: We are looking at combining gene and stem therapies to sustain diseased eye tissues. Instead of simply targeting defective genes or injecting stem cells, we are studying how to perform gene editing on the stem cells so they deliver the correct genes to the right place in the eye. We are also leaders in developing new biomaterials and surgical devices, as well as applying machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) to diagnosing and treating vision problems.

Q. Looking ahead, what progress do you see in the next five years?

Porciatti: We have a very diverse research portfolio that combines our strengths in scientific discovery and clinical care. Our professionals from many disciplines share ideas and collaborate on new strategies and tactics to improve patient care. I am confident that we will continue to recruit talented young researchers and capitalize on our exceptional history of leadership in vision research. ■

Bascom Palmer's Laboratory Research

Using the tools of 21st century medicine – including genetics, cellular biology, molecular diagnostics, advanced imaging and artificial intelligence, Bascom Palmer researchers are poised to understand why the eye may become susceptible to disease and how biotechnologies may help to prevent these conditions.



William L. McKnight, the legendary leader of Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (3M) valued research as “a key to tomorrow.” Bascom Palmer’s Evelyn F. and William L. McKnight Vision Research Center embodies his generosity and enthusiastic support of research on the nervous system and the eye as a “window to the brain and body.” Laboratories, primarily based in the McKnight Research Center, are home to Bascom Palmer’s scientists as they continue to advance the frontiers of ophthalmology. Meet some of Bascom Palmer’s researchers as they describe their work – in their own words.

Dr. Daniel Pelaez and Dr. Galina Dvorianchikova inspect a batch of freshly isolated stem cells they will use to create a new human retina in the lab as part of the Pelaez lab program on regenerative ophthalmology.





**Mohamed Abou Shousha,
M.D., Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor of
Clinical Ophthalmology*

With more than 580 patients in clinical trials and 26 U.S. and international patents, Bascom Palmer's Artificial Intelligence and Computer Augmented Vision Laboratory is leading the way to transform vision diagnostics and personalized vision correction. The goal of the lab is to provide physicians and patients access to smarter, more accurate and portable technology to diagnose and treat visual field loss, double vision and other vision disorders. Using our AI-driven wearable technology connected to the cloud, patients can quickly and easily take vision tests and the results will be transmitted to their physicians in real time for evaluation and diagnosis. In clinical studies published in prestigious ophthalmology scientific journals, our wearable vision augmentation devices enhanced vision and helped improve mobility in 78% of enrolled patients.



Sanjoy K. Bhattacharya, Ph.D.

Professor of Ophthalmology

My research interests are restoration of visual function in glaucoma and multiple sclerosis. Our research has two distinct arms: first, the long-distance axon regeneration, reinnervation and functional restoration; and second, achieving homeostasis of intraocular pressure. The research in these areas is funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Defense and the National Institutes of Health, respectively. The axon regeneration involves expansion of membranes that includes synthesis and transport of lipids in neurons. The membrane lipid composition of trabecular meshwork is consequential for pressure homeostasis. Our group utilizes cell culture, experimental models and multiomics mass spectrometry, imaging mass spectrometry, high-resolution imaging, electrophysiology, and computer natural language processing combined with usual bioinformatics tools for these analyses.

Delia Cabrera DeBuc, Ph.D.

Research Associate Professor of Ophthalmology

My research focuses on developing novel imaging biomarkers of the onset and progression of ophthalmic and neurological diseases. Our research group has refined quantitative tools and introduced innovative measures to analyze retinal images to quantify retinal structure and function abnormalities as well as treatment-induced changes in patients with ocular and neurodegenerative diseases (e.g., diabetic retinopathy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease). In our laboratory, we have identified and evaluated low-cost, user-friendly, and non-invasive technologies to screen the eyes in the elderly at risk of

mild cognitive impairment using the eye-brain connectome approach.

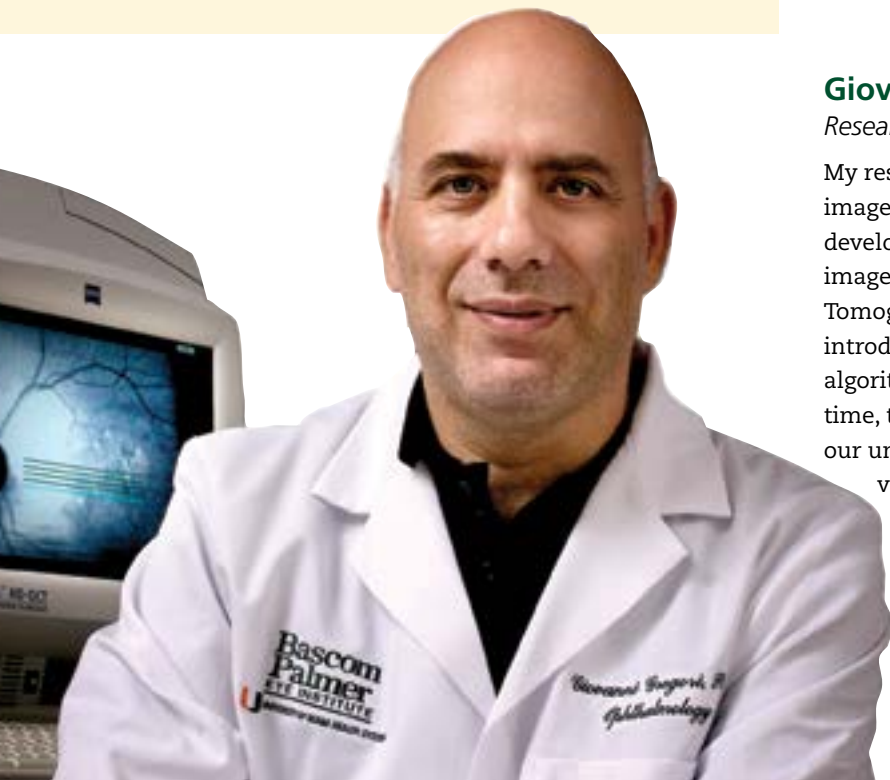
We are also devoted to artificial intelligence applications for disease diagnosis, running a multidisciplinary lab, and collaborating extensively with national and international investigators.

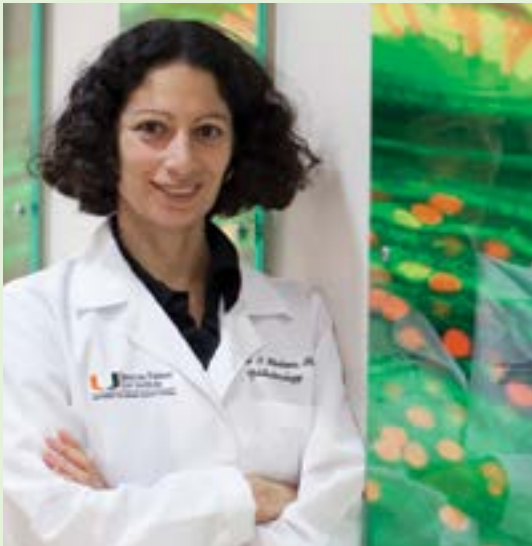


Giovanni Gregori, Ph.D.

Research Associate Professor of Ophthalmology

My research focuses on the clinical applications of medical image processing. My group has been a leader in the development of quantitative tools for the analysis of retinal images, in particular those acquired using Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) technology. Over the years we helped introduce and study a number of new powerful mathematical algorithms which have allowed us to characterize, for the first time, the retinal anatomy and geometry in detail, advancing our understanding of the pathophysiology associated with various ocular pathologies. Several of these algorithms have moved beyond clinical research and are now widely used in routine clinical settings to help diagnose and manage patients.





Abigail S. Hackam, Ph.D.

Research Professor of Ophthalmology

My laboratory investigates the response of retinal neurons and glia to damage from conditions such as inherited retinal degenerations and optic nerve trauma. Our focus is on specifically modifying the retinal damage responses in order to halt disease progression and promote tissue repair and regeneration. Current research topics include developing Wnt signaling pathway activators and innate immunity modulators as potential therapies. Additional research areas include identifying molecules that contribute to neuropathic pain in dry eye and characterizing the effect of specific dietary supplements on retinal health. My lab's research is supported by the National Institutes of Health and private foundations.

J. William Harbour, M.D.

Professor and the Mark J. Daily Chair in Ophthalmology

My research focuses on improving outcomes for patients with eye cancers, such as uveal melanoma and retinoblastoma. My team of scientists from across the world uses a range of scientific methods, including genetics, genomics, cell biology, computational biology, developmental biology, and bioinformatics to make some of the most important discoveries in the field. The unique capabilities of Bascom Palmer allow us to deliver the best patient care available, while continuing to make new discoveries that further improve patient outcomes. Among many contributions, we developed the industry standard and most widely used prognostic test for uveal melanoma, and we recently discovered a new immunotherapy target for uveal melanoma that has led to a groundbreaking new clinical trial.



Dmitry V. Ivanov, Ph.D.

Research Associate Professor of Ophthalmology

The ongoing studies in my laboratory are aimed at exploring the signaling cascades and the epigenetic mechanisms involved in ocular development and regeneration, with a specific focus on neurogenesis and gliogenesis in the developing retina, and on strategies geared toward stimulating neuronal regeneration in the adult retina. The second important direction of my laboratory research has been to understand the role and mechanism of sterile inflammation, or innate immune response in the absence of live pathogens, in the pathophysiology of retinal disorders, with a specific interest in the contribution of a signal for “danger” (the so called damage-associated molecular patterns or DAMPs) and pattern recognition receptors.



Xiang Run Huang, Ph.D.

Research Associate Professor of Ophthalmology

My research goal is to develop optical methods for early diagnosis and sensitive monitoring of glaucoma. My research interests include the optical properties of the retinal nerve fiber layer (RNFL), their damage mechanisms in glaucoma and imaging technologies for early detection of the damage. My recent studies found that change of RNFL optical properties was associated with

not only changes of axonal ultrastructure but also its functional activities. My current research focuses on developing a new imaging method that measures the RNFL reflectance at different wavelengths and proposing a new optical parameter, spectral contrast, for detection of glaucoma at an early stage, before irreversible visual field loss has occurred.



Fabrice Manns, Ph.D.

Professor of Biomedical Engineering and Ophthalmology

I work closely with Dr. Jean-Marie Parel, Dr. Marco Ruggeri, and clinicians to develop new devices to image and measure the eye. These devices provide data that will help improve the visual outcomes of procedures such as cataract surgery or LASIK. In parallel, our team studies the optical system of the eye and its changes throughout our lifespan. The goal is to better understand how refractive errors, such as myopia, develop during childhood, and also how we progressively lose our ability to focus on near objects later in life, a condition known as presbyopia. This knowledge will help design new approaches for vision correction.

Stefan Kurtenbach, Ph.D.

Research Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology

My research focus lies on how genomic aberrations and resulting epigenetic changes foster tumor development. Using methylation profiling, RNA-seq, ChIP-seq, ATAC-seq, and single-cell sequencing, my projects aim to elucidate genetic and epigenetic changes that sub-characterize metastatic uveal melanoma (UM) and other cancers, to reverse these pharmacologically, for which in-vitro and experimental models are being used. My career goal is to make significant contributions to understanding the underlying mechanisms on how these genomic aberrations foster tumor development, using state-of-the-art genomics methods. Giving talks at patient retreats and with close contact with patients, I witness the suffering caused by notoriously hard to treat cancers. While we have gained comprehensive insight into the chromosomal, mutational, and expression changes correlating with tumor sub-types and metastatic risk, we are still lacking knowledge about how these aberrations cause these cancers. I am also involved with projects related to myeloid malignancies and retinoblastoma.



Richard K. Lee, M.D., Ph.D.

Associate Professor and the Walter G. Ross Distinguished Chair in Ophthalmic Research

As a clinician-scientist, my research focuses not only on the molecular, cellular, and proteomic mechanisms of retinal ganglion cell death (which results in vision loss through glaucoma), but also developing new surgical procedures and improving the outcomes of glaucoma surgeries, especially minimally invasive laser surgeries. I have been involved in the major national and international genetic studies for glaucoma risk. Our basic science understanding of how nerve cells in the eye are damaged are resulting in translational research (such as the discovery of new molecular targets for improving optic nerve cell survival) which will lead to new paradigms for the treatment of glaucoma and optic neuropathies.

Yiwen Li, M.D.

Research Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology

My research is focused on neuroprotective treatment of retinal neurons using neuroprotective agents, including neurotrophic factors. I am currently working on mesencephalic astrocyte drive neurotrophic factor (MANF), which has shown significant protection on photoreceptor and retinal ganglion cell survival in my experiments with disease models. I molecularly dissected MANF and showed that the first half of the MANF molecule (the N-terminal domain) possesses the full neurotrophic activity of MANF. My work now is focused on the development of MANF N-terminal domain as a novel neurotrophic factor for retinal degenerative disorders.





Darlene Miller, D.H.Sc., M.P.H.

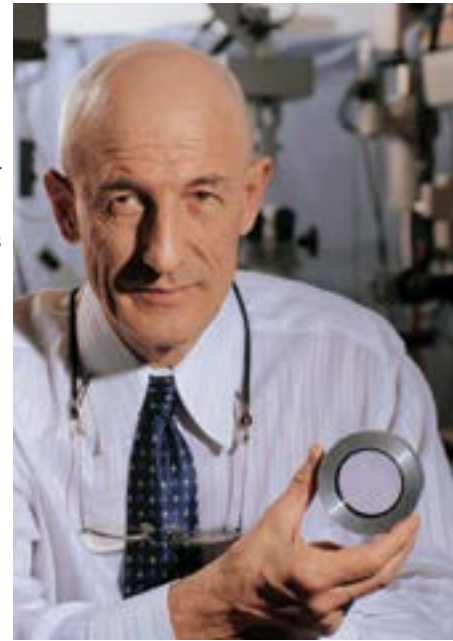
Research Professor of Ophthalmology

The ocular microbiology laboratory collaborates with faculty, fellows, residents, staff, and students to investigate new and innovative laboratory and clinical techniques for the detection and prevention of ocular infectious diseases. My research interests include: investigation of microbial pathogenesis and molecular epidemiology of ocular infections, role of the ocular surface microbiota and microbial microbiomes interactions and outcomes in contact lens-associated microbial keratitis, and use and impact of pharmacodynamics and pharmacokinetics of common ocular antimicrobials on the management and emergence of antibiotic resistance. A new and evolving focus of our laboratory is the application of artificial intelligence and other big data platforms for the detection, diagnosis and management of corneal ulcers.

Jean-Marie Parel, Ing.ETS-G, Ph.D.

Research Associate Professor and the Henri & Flore Lesieur Chair in Ophthalmology

My research and that of the Ophthalmic Biophysics Center team focuses on helping clinicians to improve patient care by combining biophysics and engineering. Our center developed a web-controlled robotized slit-lamp, an instrument to assess the light sensitivity of patients undergoing gene therapy and treatments for the effects of traumatic brain injuries. The instrument is useful for remote patient examinations from anywhere in the world and also in a pandemic. We also developed an instrument using LEDs and a light-sensitive drug to treat patients with corneal infections. Under development are: an optical system to visualize aqueous humor scleral outflow, subminiature implants releasing medications to treat glaucoma, a biocompatible titanium keratoprosthesis (artificial cornea) for patients not amenable to cornea transplant, and several diagnostic instruments.



Daniel Pelaez, Ph.D.

Research Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology

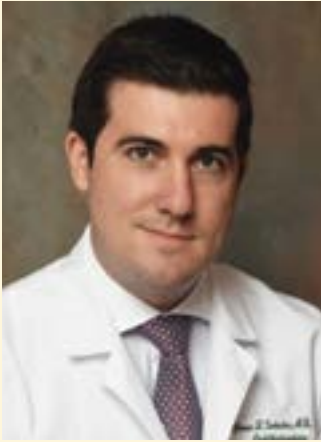
The two main areas of research in my laboratory are molecular biology of eye diseases and regenerative ophthalmology. We harness the power of stem cells, advanced biomaterials, tissue engineering, and molecular genetics to replace cells and tissues and restore the functions that are lost to disease or trauma. By applying the latest and most innovative analytical techniques, we explore the molecular events that trigger the onset of disease processes, or promote their progression, in order to develop truly effective therapies that go beyond halting the course of a disease and actually help to regenerate what has already been lost. We have ongoing projects focusing on optic nerve, retinal neurons, and lacrimal gland regeneration.

Marco Ruggeri, Ph.D.

Research Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology

I work with physicians and other engineers to develop diagnostic and surgical devices that can have direct impact on patient eye care. The diagnostic devices produce images of the eye and data that will enable clinicians to better diagnose and treat diseases such as pediatric retinopathies and keratoconus, a progressive corneal disease. The surgical devices will improve the outcomes of cataract surgery, corneal transplants, ocular tumors removal and other microsurgeries by guiding clinicians with images and measurements of the eye during surgery, and with robots to conduct delicate surgical maneuvers inside the eye. Our team also engineers imaging technology that we use to better understand the mechanisms of myopia and presbyopia.





Alfonso L. Sabater, M.D., Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology

My laboratory investigates new strategies to protect and regenerate the cornea, which is the clear outer layer at the front of the eye. Work by our lab and others has shown that corneal damage due to multiple causes can be slowed and even reversed by a variety of approaches. These approaches include activating cell survival and proliferation signaling, blocking strategic cell death pathways, and selectively replacing corneal layers through cell therapy and tissue engineering. In doing so, we can protect the cornea and treat both rare and common diseases including dry eye syndrome, bullous keratopathy, corneal transplant failure, corneal infections and limbal stem cell deficiency.

Valery I. Shestopalov, Ph.D.

Professor of Ophthalmology

My research projects in the retina investigate cellular and molecular mechanisms underlying injury, loss of functionality, and death of retinal ganglion cell, which is a fundamental clinical problem and the cause of blindness in many human diseases, such as glaucoma, ischemic optic neuropathy, and other optic nerve diseases. We have analyzed transcriptomic and proteomic changes in human glaucoma and used genetically modified experimental models to identify glial-specific and neuron-specific pathways activated in response to ocular hypertension, the major risk factor of glaucoma. These differentially activated pathways contribute to retinal stress and degeneration and often represent new drug targets for these blinding diseases. In particular, we have identified new therapeutic targets in the glaucomatous, ischemic and post-traumatic retina, blockade, or therapeutic modulation of which suppresses or prevents degeneration of ganglion cell, the underlying cause of blindness. Most of these targets are related to regulation and assembly of an innate immune complex, known as “inflammasome,” aberrant overactivation of which has been demonstrated and linked in our studies to neuronal dysfunction and death. Inactivation of such activity completely protected retinal neurons, their functionality, and preserved vision in experimental glaucoma and traumatic optic nerve injury models.

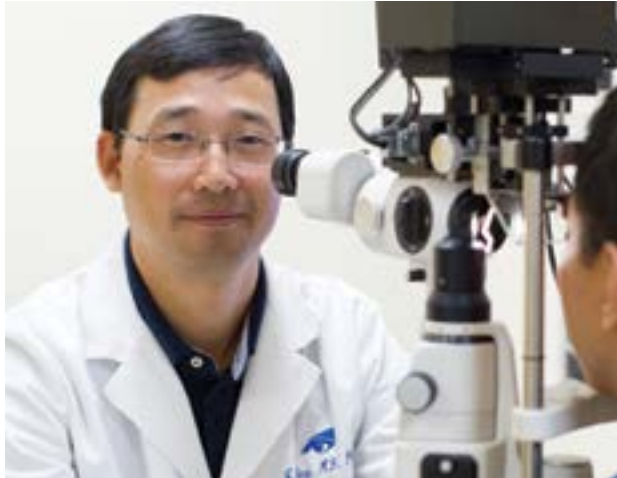


Luis E. Vazquez, M.D., Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness worldwide that results from the degeneration of retinal ganglion cells (RGCs) and the optic nerve. There is no cure for glaucoma, and current treatment is aimed at lowering the intraocular pressure (IOP) to slow disease progression. The pathogenesis of RGC death remains unknown, but has been proposed to involve decreased vascular perfusion as a consequence of elevated IOP. We hypothesize that the vascular tone held by vascular smooth muscle cells (VSMCs) controls blood flow and retinal perfusion and plays a major role in RGC health. We aim to identify signal transduction pathways that control muscle tone in retinal VSMCs. Our goal is to find novel ways to improve blood perfusion and open new avenues for treatment of glaucoma and other eye diseases.





Jianhua (Jay) Wang, M.D., Ph.D., M.S.

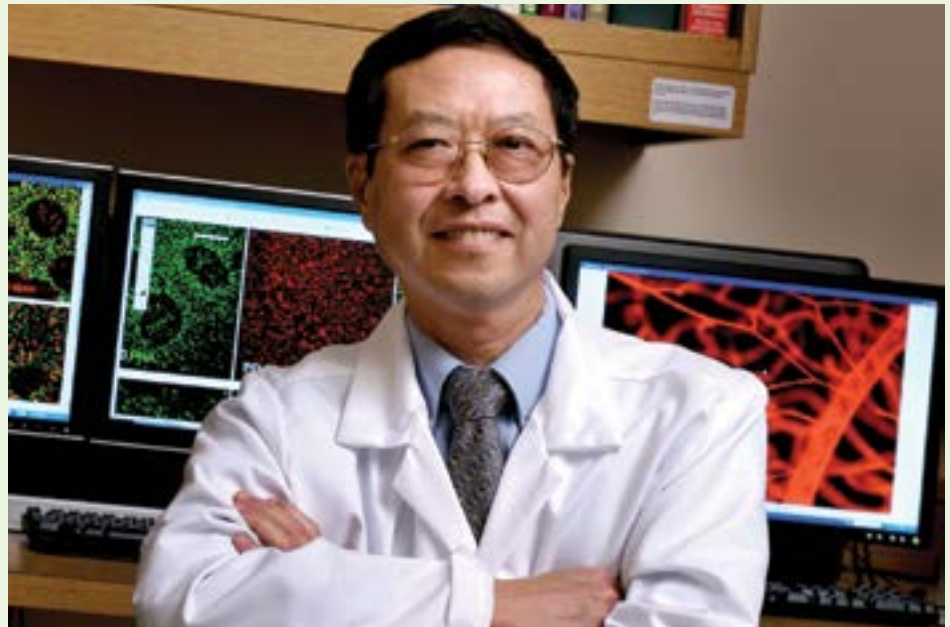
Professor of Ophthalmology and Electrical and Computer Engineering

My research focuses on the development of advanced ophthalmic imaging and its applications in eye research. A wide range of ophthalmic imaging modalities has been developed at Bascom Palmer to study structural and functional alterations in eyes during normal aging and eyes with various disorders. Working with Dr. Hong Jiang, neurologist and neuro-ophthalmologist, the team also focuses on microvasculature and microstructure of the eye as a window of the central nerve system. The research, funded by grants from the National Institutes of Health, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, and Florida Department of Health, explores the change in the eye in age-related dementia.

Rong Wen, M.D., Ph.D.

Professor of Ophthalmology

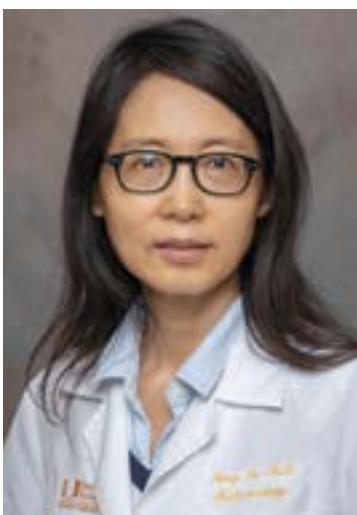
The goal of my research is to understand the biology of the retina and photoreceptors, the physiopathology of retinal diseases, and to translate the bench research to patient care. I have been working on hereditary retinal degenerations to understand the mechanisms for photoreceptor degeneration that are caused by specific mutations, and to develop neuroprotective therapy. In addition, I am collaborating with a retinal imaging colleague to develop novel non-invasive imaging technologies that could provide ophthalmologists with molecular information in the retina.



Hong Yu, Ph.D.

Research Assistant Professor

Our long-term research objectives are to investigate mechanisms of neuronal death and test potential therapeutics, with a focus on mitochondrial diseases. Our laboratory has three ongoing projects related to neurodegenerative diseases caused by mitochondrial gene mutation. The first project is to determine the etiology and potential treatments for Leber Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON), the most common primary mitochondrial genetic disorder. Our laboratory, which was directed by the late Dr. John Guy, has pioneered a novel technology to efficiently introduce DNA directly into mitochondria, both in vitro and in vivo. This technology allows us to restore the respiratory function in cells carrying LHON mutations, create bona fide LHON experimental models, and develop and test potential therapeutic strategies. The second project seeks to develop clinically relevant strategies for the treatment of Maternally Inherited Leigh Syndrome and Neurogenic Ataxia and Retinitis Pigmentosa, a pair of neurologic diseases renowned for causing death and blindness in children and young adults. In the third project, preclinical studies for LHON intervention will be performed using our mito-targeting technology to deliver wildtype ND4 directly into mitochondria. ■



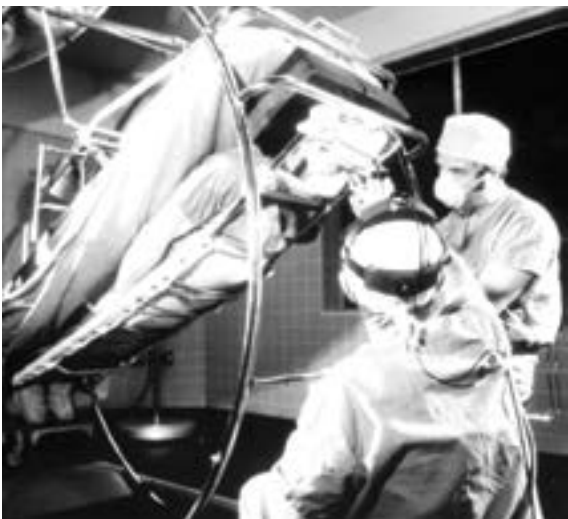
Advancing patient care around the world with innovation and invention

Ophthalmic Biophysics Center

In 1969, Jean-Marie Parel, Ph.D., Ing., ETS-G, a Swiss-born biomedical engineer, joined Bascom Palmer and helped change the field of ophthalmology.

That year, he met retinal specialist Robert Machemer, M.D., and Helmut Buettner, M.D., a research fellow. Together they conceived the idea for an instrument (later called the Vitreous Infusion Suction Cutter or VISC) that could remove the diseased vitreous fluid while maintaining the shape of the eye through an infusion of saline solution. "This one tool could do three different things," said Parel. "It provided the foundation for doing intraocular microsurgery while preventing the collapse of the eye."

That remarkable success led to the 1971 founding of Bascom Palmer's Ophthalmic Biophysics Center for one single reason: to help the doctors in the Institute deliver better patient care. Through its five decades, the OBC team has invented or improved more than 350 surgical instruments or devices with many more in the works. The most notable include: the



In the early 1970s, Bascom Palmer's Ophthalmic Biophysics Center made this rotating table for retinal detachment surgery. Gas was injected in the eye and the patient remained face down during the surgery.

Dr. Jean-Marie Parel in the Ophthalmic Biophysics Center

Marks 50th Anniversary

VISC designed for the first vitrectomy, retinal tacks, a glaucoma microshunt (half the size of an eyelash), and developed an ocular drug transfer system known as Ocular Coulomb-Controlled Iontophoresis. In addition to these devices, the OBC creates novel imaging technology for real-time imaging of the eye to study a range of ocular structures and diseases.

“The doctors come to us with a problem and then we go and dream up a solution,” said Parel. “Sometimes it takes minutes and sometimes it takes days. When we come up with a solution we ask the clinicians to test it and give us their feedback. We then go back to work to refine and improve the instrument so that it satisfies the needs of the physicians and is safe for the patients.” Research at the OBC addresses all areas of ophthalmology ranging from the retina and vitreous to cornea, glaucoma, cataracts, neuro-ophthalmology and ocular oncology.

Located in the Evelyn F. and William L. McKnight Vision Research Center adjacent to Bascom Palmer’s flagship center in Miami, the Walter G. Ross Ophthalmic Biophysics Center is a unique place. The OBC team of scientists, engineers, and technicians have their own machine shop, electronic lab, chemistry lab, an optical lab to develop new lasers, and a fully equipped “operating room” to test the safety and efficacy of new instruments, implants, and surgical techniques before they are used for actual clinical or surgical care. “Not many places have all of these capabilities in one location,” Parel said.

In the 1980s, Parel’s team designed the world’s smallest motorized scissors, which were used to cut retinal membranes that obscure vision, as well as a fluid control system that improved surgical precision in vitrectomies.

The OBC closely collaborates with Drs. Fabrice Manns and Marco Ruggeri, as well as every other scientist at Bascom Palmer who needs technology support,” says Parel. In return, these gifted scientists help the OBC by sharing their knowledge and practical know-how. It is a synergistic relationship that ultimately benefits patient care. Parel currently holds more patents than any other member of the University of Miami medical school community. “Our founder, Dr. Edward Norton, recognized how biophysical engineering could make a huge difference in ophthalmology,” said Parel. “He had a far-reaching view of the future and we continue to look for new ways to improve vision care.” ■



Biomedical engineers Derek Nankivil, M.S., Ph.D., (left) and Victor Hernandez, M.S., Ph.D., are alumni of Bascom Palmer’s Ophthalmic Biophysics Center, who continue to collaborate with the OBC: Nankivil on photosensitivity projects, and Hernandez on intraocular lenses.

“Jean-Marie Parel’s innovative work at the OBC has been credited with opening up a wide range of medical treatments for diseases, and millions of patients around the world have better vision as a result of his vision and expertise.”

– Dr. Eduardo Alfonso

Saving Lives – Saving Vision

Taking a Holistic Approach to Eye Cancer Care and Research



Dr. J. William Harbour and Dr. Zelia Correa

For J. William Harbour, M.D., and Zelia M. Correa, M.D., Ph.D., finding new therapies for dangerous eye cancers is truly a labor of love. The husband-and-wife team take a coordinated approach to treating adult and pediatric patients in Bascom Palmer's Ocular Oncology Service, while pursuing new discoveries in its leading-edge Ocular Oncology Laboratory.

"Bascom Palmer's unique clinical and research programs and our stellar faculty allow us to deliver the best possible patient care, while making new findings that improve patient outcomes," said Harbour, professor of ophthalmology, director of ocular oncology, vice chair for translational research, and the Mark J. Daily Chair in Ophthalmology. Drawing on Bascom Palmer's exceptional resources – including advanced imaging equipment and one of the world's top eye pathology laboratories – the Florida Lions Ocular Pathology Laboratory under the direction of Sander Dubovy, M.D., – Harbour and Correa are leading one of the world's elite ocular oncology referral centers.

A world renown ocular cancer specialist with extensive surgical experience, Correa joined Bascom Palmer as professor of ophthalmology and co-director of ocular oncology in 2020. She previously held the prestigious Tom Clancy Professorship at Wilmer Eye Institute of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

"Dr. Correa's career has been characterized by outstanding accomplishments, not only in the field of ocular oncology, but also in vitreoretinal

surgery, ophthalmic pathology, medical education, and leadership development," said Eduardo C. Alfonso, M.D., director of Bascom Palmer and the Kathleen and Stanley J. Glaser Chair in Ophthalmology. Correa's current research focuses on the use of artificial intelligence to distinguish benign from malignant ocular tumors based on imaging characteristics.

Along with their roles at Bascom Palmer, Harbour and Correa also serve on the faculty of Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center of the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, where Harbour is associate director for basic science. He is also a member of the Interdisciplinary Stem Cell Institute at the University of Miami. "These close ties with Sylvester allow us to provide coordinated holistic care for our ocular cancer patients and to initiate highly innovative clinical trials to benefit patients," said Correa.

In keeping with that comprehensive approach, Harbour and Correa collaborate with Sylvester specialists, such as Jose Lutzky, M.D., professor of medicine and director of the Cutaneous Oncology Services; and Lynn G. Feun, M.D., professor of medicine and co-leader of the Melanoma Site Disease Group.

"We are in a unique position to support our patients from the initial diagnosis through surgery, medication or radiation treatment and follow-up care if issues arise later in life," said Correa. "No other ocular oncology center in the U.S. has the same resources and ability to provide coordinated support to patients whose disease may have spread beyond the eye."

"Bascom Palmer's multidisciplinary team of experts is highly skilled and experienced in treating every type of eye cancer. Since eye cancers are uncommon and potentially life-threatening, they require treatment at a highly skilled center providing the most advanced therapies."

– Dr. J. William Harbour

A study analyzing new evolutionary complexity in uveal melanoma by

J. WILLIAM HARBOUR, M.D., was recently

published in *Nature Communications*, a highly regarded, peer-reviewed scientific journal. "This is the first-ever single cell analysis of uveal melanoma. We discovered previously unrecognized genetic and cellular complexity in this deadly eye cancer," said Harbour. Uveal melanoma is the most common primary cancer of the eye, with approximately 2,000 – 3,000 cases diagnosed each year in the United States. It is highly metastatic and unresponsive to checkpoint immunotherapy. This work was supported by National Cancer Institute grant R01 CA125970, Research to Prevent Blindness, Inc. Senior Scientific Investigator Award, the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine Medical Scientist Training Program, the University of Miami Sheila and David Fuente Graduate Program in Cancer Biology, the Center for Computational Science Fellowship, the Melanoma Research Foundation Senior Investigator award, and a generous gift from Dr. Mark J. Daily. Bascom Palmer received funding from NIH Core Grant P30EY014801 and a Research to Prevent Blindness Unrestricted Grant. The Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center also received funding from the National Cancer Institute Core Support Grant P30CA240139.



Dr. Stefan Kurtenbach

Improving clinical outcomes

Since joining Bascom Palmer in 2012, Harbour has worked tirelessly to create a unique fusion of world-class patient care and cutting-edge research to revolutionize the care and treatment of patients with eye cancers such as uveal melanoma in adults and retinoblastoma in children.

“Our laboratory takes a wide approach to research, looking at genetics, genomics, cell biology, computational biology, developmental biology, and bioinformatics to find new therapies for patients with eye cancer,” said Harbour, who has recruited and mentored a rising cadre of research stars at Bascom Palmer, including research assistant professors Stefan Kurtenbach, Ph.D., and Daniel Pelaez, Ph.D., who also serves as scientific director of the Dr. Nasser Al-Rashid Orbital Vision Research Center.

In the past decade, Bascom Palmer’s research has advanced the development of treatments for ocular cancers. “Our team developed the most widely used prognostic test for uveal melanoma and discovered a new immunotherapy target for patients with this cancer,” said Harbour, who is now enrolling patients into a clinical trial to investigate a promising new

immune checkpoint inhibitor. “Our excellence in patient care allows us to recruit participants from around the world into our research program, helping us turn laboratory discoveries into new treatments,” he said.

Advanced ocular surgery

Today, patients with uveal melanomas may also benefit from Correa’s innovative surgical skills. She is an expert in pars plana vitrectomy procedures that involve removing dying melanoma tissue from the eye after radiation therapy to preserve vision and avoid enucleation following cancer treatment.

“We have made great progress in understanding and treating uveal melanomas,” she said. “Two decades ago, many patients became blind or lost their eyes after life-saving radiation therapies. Now, we have better drugs and more advanced surgery, such that we are able to salvage the majority of eyes we treat.”

To deliver good ocular outcomes after radiation, Correa takes a close look at the eye’s vascular structure and uses certain medications to control fluid leaking and bleeding or reduce inflammation. In selected cases, vitreoretinal surgery is an additional tool used to reattach the retina after tumor treatment. “Our patients generally do very well with this procedure,” she said. “In addition to salvaging more eyes, we can safeguard peripheral vision, and even maintain a degree of central vision in some patients, improving the quality of life of cancer survivors for many years.”

Treating retinoblastomas

Through Harbour’s leadership, Bascom Palmer has become a national and international hub for treatment and research for young children with retinoblastoma, a rare but highly malignant cancer

“We have made great progress in understanding and treating uveal melanomas. Two decades ago, many patients became blind or lost their eyes after life-saving radiation therapies. Now, we have better drugs and more advanced surgery, such that we are able to salvage the majority of eyes we treat.”

— Dr. Zelia Correa

that develops inside the eye early in life. In the provision of world-class patient care for retinoblastoma patients, Harbour and Correa work closely with other experts at Sylvester, including Fernando Corrales-Medina, M.D., associate professor of clinical medicine and a pediatric hematology-oncology specialist. “We also offer the benefit of an in-house pharmacy team to infuse medications so these procedures can be done safely on even young infants,” Harbour said.

Harbour and Correa work closely with other Bascom Palmer ocular cancer specialists, including Carol L. Karp, M.D., a specialist in corneal and conjunctival tumors, as well as the Institute’s ophthalmic, plastic and reconstructive surgeons who treat eyelid and orbital cancers: Chris R. Alabiad, M.D.; Thomas E. Johnson, M.D.; Bradford W. Lee, M.D., M.Sc.; Wendy W. Lee, M.D., M.S.; Brian C. Tse, M.D.; David T. Tse, M.D.; and Sara T. Wester, M.D.

A unique new fellowship

To continue advancing care for patients with ocular cancers and education of the next generation of leaders in ocular oncology, Harbour and Correa last year launched a new ocular oncology fellowship that emphasizes the importance of vitreoretinal skills in the complete management of patients with eye cancer.

“We have a growing volume of patients and can offer an excellent training opportunity,” said Harbour, who was a vitreoretinal fellow at Bascom Palmer in 1994-95. “We offer an innovative fellowship that emphasizes the critical role of vitreoretinal skills in the optimal care of ocular oncology patients and the increasingly vital scientific knowledge required to provide



Dr. Eric Hansen

state-of-the-art patient care. We provide research opportunities for an in-depth understanding of the science behind eye cancer, as well as clinical and surgical training to provide the best possible care for ocular cancer patients.”

The program’s first fellow, Eric D. Hansen, M.D., will soon be returning to a faculty position at the University of Utah, where he will be the first fully trained ocular oncologist in that part of the country. The second fellow will be Bascom Palmer’s chief resident, Nathan L. Scott, M.D., M.P.P., who will begin the fellowship later this year.



Dr. Nathan Scott

Reflecting on their personal and professional collaboration, Harbour and Correa said they often discuss cases and bounce ideas off each other. “There is a great deal of professional synergy between us,” Harbour said. “Together, we have expanded our clinical reach to extend throughout Florida and beyond, while advancing our life-saving research initiatives.” ■

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POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS OF OCULAR CANCER. IF YOU HAVE ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS, CONTACT YOUR EYE DOCTOR.

- Floaters (spots or wavy lines in your vision) or flashes of light
- Blurry vision
- A spot on the colored part of eye that is getting bigger



- Bulging of your eye
- A lump or sore on your eyelid or on your eye that’s increasing in size



- Pain in or around your eye
- In a child, the pupil (the dark central part of the eye) looks white rather than black, or in a photograph the red reflex is seen in one eye but not the other



photo courtesy of AAO

New Diagnostic Tools and Therapies for Ocular Surface Diseases

Like Sherlock Holmes, the vision detectives at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute search carefully for clues when diagnosing and treating ocular surface diseases. They know there can be many causes of discomfort, pain, blurry vision and other symptoms associated with the transparent multi-layer surface of the cornea.



Dr. Guillermo Amescua “We are leading the way in clinical care, with a wide spectrum of personalized treatments to preserve and restore our patients’ vision,” said Guillermo Amescua, M.D., associate professor of clinical ophthalmology and medical director of the ocular surface program. “Our researchers have developed special medications, biological therapies, and photodynamic treatments, while gaining a better understanding of this important, but often neglected, aspect of vision care.”

Blurry vision, eye discomfort or pain, redness, or itching may be symptoms of ocular surface disorders of the surface of the cornea—the transparent layer that forms the front of the eye. Unfortunately, cases often go undiagnosed and undertreated due to a lack of understanding of symptoms and inaccurate evaluation. Effective diagnosis, care, and management of ocular surface disorders demand highly specialized expertise.

Dry Eye

Dry eye is a chronic progressive disease associated with aging that affects about 34 million adults in the U.S. Symptoms can vary from mild discomfort to severe pain and blurry vision, and the causes include lack of tear production, blockages in the meibomian glands, eyelid abnormalities that can abrade the surface, allergies, scarring, and immunological conditions.

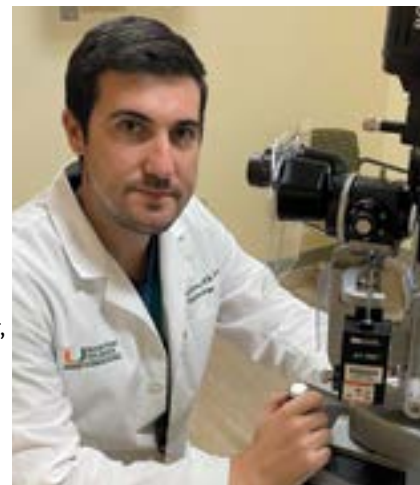
“Dry eye is a complex disease that must be carefully evaluated in order to apply the appropriate treatment,” said Alfonso L. Sabater, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of ophthalmology. “There can be

issues involving the mucin, aqueous or lipid layers of the corneal surface.

However, the most common is a mixed dry eye with deficiencies in tears or lipid production.”

At Bascom Palmer, specialists in ocular surface disorders have developed an algorithm to rapidly identify and address the

causes of dry eye. Once that has been determined, treatments may include artificial tears, medications to stimulate tear production, plugs to slow the drainage of tears, or stimulating the meibomian glands to remove blockages. For dry eye patients who do not respond to these treatments, Sabater and his team have developed a biological therapy program using the patient’s blood plasma or serum to regenerate tear cells and protect the cornea.



Dr. Alfonso Sabater



Dr. Terrence O'Brien

In some cases, surgical treatments may be necessary, including corneal transplants to replace damaged tissue. “We are also developing therapies to take cells from the patient, grow them in the laboratory and bring them back to the cornea, without waiting for a donor graft,” said Sabater.

To reduce the risk of dry eye, Sabater suggests gently washing the eyelids with warm water and a compress each day, and removing makeup or other debris on the lashes as well as the lids. Both techniques can help keep the meibomian glands healthy.

“Through the years, my work has largely been supported from philanthropic donations,” said Sabater. “That has helped us launch several projects and generate preliminary results or a proof of concept that is vital for applying for federal research grants.”

“Dry eye is one of the most common ocular surface problems, affecting millions of people worldwide,” said Terrence P. O’Brien, M.D., professor of ophthalmology and the Charlotte Breyer Rodgers Chair in Ophthalmology. O’Brien leads the ocular surface team at Palm Beach Gardens.

“Thanks to the generosity of Carl Shapiro and his family, we have recently established a Center for Ocular Surface Diseases on our Palm Beach Gardens campus,” said O’Brien, who has treated Shapiro for more than a decade. “This wonderful gift brings a greater focus on these pervasive sight-stealing problems. With the Shapiro family donation, patients have access to advanced automated equipment to provide thermal pulsation of the meibomian gland as well as automated equipment used for infrared imaging.

“These are dynamic imaging and treatment systems that allow us to assess the function of the meibomian glands that spread a thin oily layer over the eye’s surface,” said O’Brien. “If the glands are congested, we can provide a safe and effective thermal treatment to improve flow and provide long-lasting relief of symptoms. This technology is an important addition to our comprehensive approach for treating dry eye syndromes and ocular surface diseases.”



Dr. Jaime Martinez

Dry Eye Questionnaire

“Dry eye questionnaires are essential tools to diagnose dry eye disease in our patients,” said Jaime D. Martinez, M.D., assistant professor of clinical ophthalmology. “They are essential for diagnosis, as dry eye may cause

discomfort and affect performance and quality of life.” In collaboration with ophthalmologists at the Asociacion Para Evitar la Ceguera in Mexico, Martinez validated questionnaires for Spanish-speaking patients that will benefit patients not only in South Florida, but worldwide as well.

The relationship between symptoms and signs of dry eye is not linear and varies according to individuals and dry eye types. This stresses the importance of accurately quantifying ocular surface symptoms as a screening tool that can assist in establishing the medical necessity for additional dry eye evaluation, monitoring the progression of the condition and response to treatment. It is crucial to validate translated dry eye questionnaires, given the increased use of telemedicine. This requires those involved to speak the same language to achieve a correct diagnosis and excellent clinical follow-up

Scleral Lens

Patients suffering from dry eye or a variety of other conditions may also benefit from scleral contact lenses. A scleral lens is a large contact lens that rests on the sclera, (the “white” portion of the eye), and creates a tear-filled vault over the cornea so that the eye remains in a liquid environment. The ocular surface disorders team includes Stephanie Frankel, O.D., and Priscilla Sotomayor, O.D. “Dr. Frankel and Dr. Sotomayor take great care of our ocular surface patients,” said Amescua. “Their expertise with the scleral lens provides many patients with vision and ocular surface protection.”

Ocular Pain

Problems with tears and lipids are far from the only cause of dry eye pain. “Many patients report their eyes feel dry or dirty, but still have a normal flow of fluids,” said Anat Galor, M.D., associate professor of ophthalmology. “In some cases, the cause might not even be in the eye.”



Dr. Anat Galor

In her role as a pain detective, Galor focuses on the peripheral nerves serving the eye, as well as the brain itself. That’s because some eye medications can increase the sensitivity of nerves serving the ocular surface. Lasik or cataract surgery can also affect peripheral nerves, and a traumatic brain injury may lead to problems with the central nervous system.

When asked if dry eye can cause migraine pain, Galor said there may be a connection through the nerves, especially for migraine sufferers who are very sensitive to light. “One of the biggest challenges we face is when a patient comes with an ocular surface that looks perfect but still feels pain or dryness in the eye,” said Galor. “We may need to run tests of the nerves during the evaluation to try to identify the cause of the pain. We also need support for further research to find new treatment modalities to combat ocular pain.”

Ocular Infections

With year-round heat and humidity, South Florida offers an ideal environment for bacteria, fungi, viruses, and parasites that can infect the surface of the eye. If improperly diagnosed or left untreated, these ocular infections can lead to permanent damage or loss of vision. “It often takes serious detective work to determine the cause of an infection and find the right medication,” said Amescua. “Because we see so many patients with infections – including referrals from the Caribbean and Latin America – our ocular pathology and microbiology laboratories have extensive experience in making a diagnosis.”

To treat these tropical infectious organisms, the Institute’s pharmacy has developed special compound medications, along with more standard therapies. “Unfortunately, many organisms are becoming increasingly resistant to our drugs, so we are researching new ways to treat infections,” said Amescua.

“With mentorship from Dr. Jean-Marie Parel and Bascom Palmer’s Ophthalmic Biophysics Center, our team has developed a photodynamic therapy for treating aggressive infections. We have found that Rose bengal activated by green fluorescent light can make the cornea stronger and more resistant to the enzymes produced by microorganisms,” he added.

Amescua is collaborating with ophthalmologists at the LV Prasad Eye Institute in India and the University of California San Francisco Proctor Foundation for Research in Ophthalmology on studies to validate the findings in advance of potential clinical trials in the United States. “We are grateful for the support we received to begin this project, which will benefit many patients around the world.”



Dr. Carol Karp

Conjunctival Tumors

Several types of cancerous tumors can occur on the conjunctiva, the membrane that covers the front of the eye and the eyelids. As with other forms of cancer, early diagnosis and treatment is vital for good outcomes.

“It is my job to determine if a patient has cancer, determine the type of cancer, and get rid of the malignancy,” said Carol L. Karp, M.D. Karp holds the Richard K. Forster Chair in Ophthalmology and the Dr. Ronald and Alicia Lepke Endowed Professorship in Corneal and Ocular Surface Diseases. “Thanks to the donors who have supported our research, we have made great strides in diagnosing and treating these dangerous conjunctival tumors.”

When Karp suspects squamous cell or melanoma cancer, she can do optical biopsies using ultra-high-resolution optical coherence tomography (OCT) techniques developed by Jianhua (Jay) Wang, M.D., Ph.D., M.S., professor of ophthalmology and electrical and computer engineering. “We can look at the cell patterns to determine the type of cancer, and track the progress of treatment until the cancer is eradicated,” she said.

Since the 1990s, Bascom Palmer has been a leader in curing squamous cell cancers without surgery. “We use medications compounded by our pharmacy that are very effective in curing many of these cancers,” she said. “We also offer surgical options for treating melanomas and other tumors that don’t respond to medications.

To reduce the risk of ocular cancers, Karp recommends wearing a hat and protective sunglasses when spending time outdoors. “If you see anything unusual on the surface of your eye, get it checked right away. Cancers are almost always easier to treat when they are small.” ■

Donors Advance Ocular Surface Care

Thanks to a generous donation from the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family Foundation, dry eye patients in Palm Beach Gardens will benefit from advanced diagnostic and pulsatile thermal therapeutic equipment.

A decade ago, Carl Shapiro, now age 107, was diagnosed with Ramsay Hunt Syndrome, a cranial nerve condition that prevents the eyelid from closing effectively. After several treatments that were only partially successful, the Shapiro family turned to Bascom Palmer Eye Institute for help.

“Carl required surgery to improve the function of his eyelid, along with aggressive medical therapy to manage his dry eye condition and prevent lasting damage to the cornea,” said Terrence O’Brien, M.D., who has treated Carl Shapiro for more than a decade. “Due to his advancing age, I was pleased to make several ‘house calls’ and was delighted to attend his 105th birthday party, where he had a big smile for everyone.”

Carl’s daughter, Ellen Jaffe, said her dad formed an immediate friendship with O’Brien and his wife, Masako, after his first treatment in 2010. “It became much more than a doctor-patient relationship,” she said. “We all enjoyed having dinner and spending time with them. Masako would bring beautiful flowers and they would sit and chat with my dad for a long time. It was a terrific relationship for him, as they formed a strong bond.”

Meanwhile, Philip Rosenfeld, M.D., professor of ophthalmology, treated Shapiro for age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and Tom Johnson, M.D., professor of ophthalmology, provided surgical care for his eyelids, coordinating their treatment with O’Brien as part of the team. “The whole Bascom Palmer team has been tremendous,” said Jaffe. “Thanks to these great professionals, my father has been able to retain limited vision and maintain his quality of life.”

A dedicated philanthropist

Carl Shapiro was a successful businessman who founded Kay Windsor, Inc., a women’s apparel company, in 1939. When acquired by the Vanity Fair corporation in 1971, it was one of the largest women’s clothing companies in the country. Shapiro retired in 1976, and focused on the philanthropic work of the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family Foundation, now led by his daughter, Linda Waintrup.



Ruth and Carl Shapiro

“Our father had a problem with hearing and wanted to make the world a better place for people with disabilities,” said Jaffe. “He knew that not everyone could get excellent treatment for hearing and vision difficulties, so he made that a top priority in his philanthropy.”

As for the gift to Bascom Palmer, Jaffe said, “Our family is so appreciative of the care our father received. We are fortunate that Dr. O’Brien and Bascom Palmer are here in Palm Beach Gardens, and we want to further his great work in clinical care and research on ocular surface diseases.” ■

Gilinski Family supports research, education and clinical care

Bascom Palmer also gratefully acknowledges Saul Gilinski and his family for helping Bascom Palmer deliver leading-edge care to patients with ocular surface diseases. Their gift will help create a center of excellence for ocular surface diseases. “We deeply appreciate their generosity which allows us to deliver the best possible care for patients with these challenging conditions,” said Guillermo Amescua, M.D.

The Gilinski family is also providing support for medical training and education, including research and clinical fellowships that allow professionals to gain knowledge and experience. “Being able to attract top fellows also advances our research programs,” added Amescua. “Philanthropic gifts are vital when studying new types of treatments and can help us develop the proof of concept that is essential for obtaining federal or state grants. We are grateful to the family for their commitment to our mission.” ■

Passing the Baton

Dr. Chris Alabiad to Lead Institute's Highly Regarded Residency Program

For 22 years, Steven J. Gedde, M.D., has guided Bascom Palmer's highly regarded residency program, while treating glaucoma patients and conducting research. On February 1, Chris Raif Alabiad, M.D., succeeded him as the residency program director with Jay Sridhar, M.D., as associate director at an exciting time for medical education.



Dr. Steven Gedde

"Chris and Jay are extraordinary faculty members who will provide great leadership for our training program," said Gedde, professor and holder of the John G. Clarkson Chair in Ophthalmology, as well as Bascom Palmer's vice chair for education. "Both have been actively engaged in teaching residents and developing innovative approaches to ophthalmic education."

"Bascom Palmer's residency program has a long tradition of excellence," said Alabiad, who completed an ophthalmology residency and a fellowship in oculofacial plastic surgery at the Institute. "We have unique opportunities to blend virtual and digital learning tools with clinical, laboratory, and classroom instruction," said Alabiad, an ophthalmic plastic and reconstructive surgery specialist, associate professor of clinical ophthalmology, and assistant dean for student affairs at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. "We have to be ready to adapt our residency training to new conditions, since we never know what lies ahead in the future."

Sridhar, a retina and vitreous diseases specialist who also completed his residency at Bascom Palmer, has been helping residents develop their medical and surgical skills, while developing an educational retina podcast, *Straight from the Cutter's Mouth*, that has attracted a worldwide ophthalmic audience. "The residency program is the crown jewel of our Institute," said Sridhar, associate professor of clinical ophthalmology. "It is so humbling to serve as its associate director."

Known worldwide for excellence

Under Gedde's guidance, Bascom Palmer's residency program has established a worldwide reputation for excellence, attracting a growing pool of highly qualified candidates every year. In 2003, the

Dr. Chris Alabiad



program expanded from six to seven residents per year, allowing for greater diversity in the training experience, including an elective rotation in the third year.

Historically, incoming residents would graduate medical school and then spend their first or internship year at another facility in a general medical or surgical program. They would then train at Bascom Palmer for three years of ophthalmology residency training. Last year, the program transitioned to an integrated format where the incoming residents spend their preliminary general medicine year across the street at Jackson Memorial Hospital with built-in dedicated ophthalmology rotations through the Institute's departments, prior to starting their formal Bascom Palmer residency.

"The learning curve for ophthalmology is very steep, and this allows our newest trainees to get ahead of that curve by learning earlier from attending physicians, fellows, and senior residents," Sridhar said. "We are so happy to have grown our family to 28 residents annually."

One of the program's special features is an international elective that allows residents to gain firsthand exposure to vision care in another part of the world, said Gedde. "Prior to the pandemic, our residents assisted in delivering ophthalmic care in underserved regions of the world such as India, Ethiopia, Guatemala, the Galapagos Islands, and

Haiti," said Gedde. "Closer to home, our residents have participated in outreach programs to provide free eye screening exams in underserved areas of South Florida."

Meanwhile, the Institute's residency program has been in the forefront of deploying virtual learning tools, even before the COVID-19 pandemic led to a worldwide transition in medical education. For instance, Bascom Palmer had already introduced a multifaceted surgical curriculum – including simulation training – to assist residents in transitioning to operating on live patients, said Gedde.

Other highlights in recent years include developing a formal mentoring program where incoming residents are paired with upper-level residents and faculty members, regular conferences with residents and faculty that focus on optimizing patient care and safety, and building a social services department to help needy patients.

Reflecting on his tenure, Gedde said, "The success of our residency program is the result of a collaborative effort among a talented faculty who are deeply committed to teaching the next generation of ophthalmologists, as well as our leadership team, which has provided unwavering support for medical education."

Looking to the future

Looking to the future, Alabiad plans to build on the program's strong foundation to provide high-quality training to today's residents. "We want to maintain the highest level of ethics and professionalism, while building a diverse medical workforce to serve our multicultural patient population," he said. "Our other goals include providing our residents with clinical and laboratory research experiences to help them lay the groundwork for future medical breakthroughs as thought leaders in ophthalmology."



Dr. Jay Sridhar

For several years, Alabiad has been involved in the Miller School's transition to the NextGen curriculum, which includes virtual learning tools and "flipped classroom" experiences, where students prepare for in class "case-based" learning sessions by watching homegrown Khan Academy-style educational videos. These videos provide the clinical and basic science framework in ophthalmology that the students need to engage in high-level, case-based discussions. At Bascom Palmer, he has been a leader in introducing the HelpMeSee eye surgery simulator, as well as building collaborative international educational relationships. "We are actively working with HelpMeSee, the Copenhagen Academy of Medical Education and Simulation, and the Mexican Institute of Ophthalmology to create validation studies for these simulations as we bring them into our program," he said.

Alabiad added that the pandemic has accelerated the shift to virtual learning, giving residents in

remote locations the ability to view surgeries in the operating rooms, take part in discussions at the Institute's pathology laboratory, or observe clinical diagnostic slit lamp examinations in our emergency department or clinics.

Sridhar agrees, noting that the residency program now has a "perfect balance" between virtual and in-person learning. "Digital education will be increasingly important, as this generation of residents is accustomed to online learning," he said.

Another integral aspect of the program involves developing presentation skills, added Sridhar. "It is extremely important for physicians to be good communicators, not only for their patients, but for all audiences," he said. "Our residents become experts on how to prepare, present, and comment on cases. All Grand Rounds lectures are given by our residents and fellows, and we also offer them several other subspecialty-specific opportunities throughout the year."

Meanwhile, as vice chair of education, Gedde will continue to lead the Institute's many other educational programs, including the Global Center for Ophthalmic Education. A prolific clinical researcher, he will do this while completing a five-year multicenter randomized clinical trial comparing glaucoma surgical procedures and also serving on the boards of the American Board of Ophthalmology and the American Glaucoma Society.

"We are fortunate that Dr. Gedde will continue to be a guiding light for the residency program," Alabiad said. "He has set a great example as a leader, developing a comprehensive training program where our residents feel nurtured and supported while learning everything about our field. The opportunities he has created for the residents through cutting-edge research, clinical and surgical experiences, and community and international outreach, all while cultivating a warm sense of family within the Institute, certainly explain why our program continues to garner so much national and international acclaim." ■



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, lectures and courses were held in the Jose Berrocal Auditorium. Since March 2020, all courses and lectures are given virtually.

Multiplying Bascom Palmer's Global Impact through Medical Education



Patrick Lee understands the power of education to change lives. Through his foundation, Lee has provided scholarships for students who are committed to serving their communities through professional careers. Now, Lee is continuing that

philanthropic commitment with an endowment to Bascom Palmer Eye Institute's Global Center for Ophthalmic Education.

"This gift is a powerful way to impact the field of ophthalmology," said Steven J. Gedde, M.D., Bascom Palmer's vice chair for education. "Many of our residents and fellows become leaders in academic institutions, where they train future generations of students. Our educational programs disseminate medical knowledge around the world and help ensure that our graduates provide outstanding care to their patients."

The generous donation from the Patrick P. Lee Foundation will support the virtual delivery of Bascom Palmer's educational programs to students, physicians, and other vision care professionals around the world, said Gedde, who has treated Lee for glaucoma for the past few years.

"I believe that Bascom Palmer is the number one eye institute because of doctors like Steve Gedde," said Lee. "He is a brilliant glaucoma physician who cares about his patients. He is also a great motivator and teacher, and this endowment will have a lasting impact on medical education."

Gedde said that Lee's gift will also assist in the renovation of the Mary & Edward Norton Library of Ophthalmology to house Bascom Palmer's global education center. "We are planning a conference room, offices for residents and fellows, study and lounge areas, as well as advanced telecommunication technology to create an epicenter of learning," he added.

A resident of upstate New York and South Florida, Lee founded Enidine, a Buffalo-based company that

"I believe that Bascom Palmer is the number one eye institute because of doctors like Steve Gedde. He is a brilliant glaucoma physician who cares about his patients. He is also a great motivator and teacher, and this endowment will have a lasting impact on medical education."

– Patrick Lee

became one of the premier manufacturers of shock absorption and vibration isolation products, and International Motion Control, Inc., a manufacturer and distributor of hydraulic, pneumatic and electromechanical components with facilities and offices in the United States, Europe and Asia.

Lee recalls that his first lessons in philanthropy were learned from his grandmother, who gave what little she had to those in need. As a college student, Lee was assisted by the War Orphan's Educational Assistance Program, which provided tuition assistance to the children of military men and women killed during World War II.

Lee credits education for providing the foundation for his professional success. His charitable foundation has prioritized education as a key investment area, including scholarships for students pursuing careers in engineering, mental health, and other fields.

In 2005, Lee was named "Philanthropist of the Year" by the Association of Fundraising Professionals of the Western New York Chapter, and in 2012 he was inducted into St. Louis University's Smurfit-Stone Entrepreneurial Alumni Hall of Fame. In 2013, Lee received the prestigious Horatio Alger Award from the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans – an honor given to individuals who demonstrate commitment to excellence, belief in the free-enterprise system, and the importance of higher education, community service, and the vision and determination to achieve a better future.

As Gedde said, "Patrick Lee has a wonderful heart, and we deeply appreciate his support of our educational mission." ■



Bascom Palmer Learn... Bigger and Better

www.BascomPalmerLearn.org, an online learning portal and educational resource for ophthalmologists and eye care professionals, has become bigger and better. Launched in 2020, the portal provides access to an ever-increasing collection of Bascom Palmer's Grand Rounds lectures, ophthalmic images, surgical videos, medical student courses, and virtual lectures. Physicians can also obtain continuing medical education (CME) credits.

Known throughout the world for its exceptional training programs, the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute has always regarded the education of its ophthalmology residents, fellows, medical students, and ophthalmologists from around the world as one of its highest priorities. Virtual learning brings this tradition to a new level by allowing medical professionals from around the world to acquire knowledge for patient care from Bascom Palmer's experts, from anywhere at any time. New courses, lectures, and ophthalmic images will be added on a weekly basis, ensuring there is always something new to learn.

All Eyes on Bascom Palmer's Instagram Account!

Bascom Palmer's new Instagram account is capturing eyeballs around the world – literally. Launched in early 2020, the visually oriented social media account – **@bascompalmereye** – recently surpassed 10,000 followers. It expands the Institute's social media presence, which includes Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

The Instagram account focuses on technical and educational ophthalmic content curated by our residents that allows engagement with ophthalmologists, trainees, and medical students around the world.

As part of its social media strategy, Bascom Palmer's marketing team assigned Instagram medical director and editor responsibilities to Hasenin Al-Khersan, M.D., and Nimesh "Nemo" Patel, M.D. "One of our goals was to reach more young vision professionals with image-oriented content," said Patel, a former resident who is now a voluntary assistant professor at Bascom Palmer, and also a retina specialist at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary and Boston Children's Hospital.

"We see many patients with rare conditions," said Al-Khersan, a resident who is always on the lookout for medical content to post on Instagram. "Both Nemo and I were already on Instagram, and received support from our marketing and leadership teams to deliver clinical content on the institutional site."

By contrast, Bascom Palmer's Facebook and Twitter accounts are more patient-driven, providing patients with the latest eye health news, tips, and stories, as well as patient education information about eye disease and treatments.

Follow us @bascompalmereye on your favorite social media platform. ■

Ophthalmology Times

Ranked No.1 in Overall Programs, Patient Care, and Education

Bascom Palmer Eye Institute has once again been recognized as having the best overall ophthalmology program in the United States by *Ophthalmology Times*. The annual rankings of the top ophthalmology programs in the United States are compiled from an online survey of ophthalmology chairs and residency program directors.

Ophthalmology Times has ranked the nation's best programs 18 times since 1996. Bascom Palmer has been ranked the **Best Overall Program** each year for the past six years, and for the first time, it shares the number one ranking with the Johns Hopkins Wilmer Eye Institute.

This year also marks the 14th time Bascom Palmer is recognized as having the **Best Clinical (Patient) Care** in the country; and the 13th time its **Residency Program** has been ranked in the #1 spot. Bascom Palmer's **Research Program** was ranked the fourth in the nation in this year's survey.

“Bascom Palmer’s recognition as the best in the nation is a wonderful tribute to the entire team – the excellent physicians and talented staff who deliver compassionate patient care, educate students and ophthalmic professionals, and propel vision research by making exciting discoveries in our laboratories that advance ophthalmology and patient care around the world.”

– Dr. Eduardo Alfonso

Excellence at AAO

For decades, Bascom Palmer's clinicians and researchers have tackled the world's most challenging vision diseases. This year, in its mission to advance ophthalmic education and discovery, 50 of our faculty members, residents, and fellows presented more than 160 lectures, symposiums, courses, scientific posters, and papers during the 2020 virtual American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) meeting.

Also at the AAO meeting, Bascom Palmer faculty members received these outstanding honors: Hilda Capo, M.D., received Senior Achievement and Secretariat Awards; Jayanth Sridhar, M.D. received an Achievement and Secretariat Award; and Guillermo Amescua, M.D.; Zelia M. Correa, M.D., Ph.D.; Jorge Fortun, M.D.; Anna K. Junk, M.D.; Bradford W. Lee, M.D., MPH; and Sara T. Wester, M.D., received Achievement Awards.



Congratulations to **ELIZABETH HODAPP, M.D.**, for being recognized by the American Academy of Ophthalmology as a 2020: Year of the Eye Unsung Hero. A pediatric glaucoma specialist, Hodapp was recognized by her peers for serving the underserved, mentoring the next generation of ophthalmologists, and sharing her skills with the world. Often cited for her gift of “cutting right to the heart” of

complex cases in training residents and fellows, Hodapp gives this advice to clinicians: “Be hard enough on yourself. Don’t be too hard on yourself. Everybody makes mistakes. Do the best you can. Keep good records, and tell the truth.”



Congratulations to **EDUARDO C. ALFONSO, M.D.**, for receiving the 2020 Claes Dohlman Award presented by the Cornea Society and Eye Bank Association of America. This prestigious award, named in honor of Claes H. Dohlman, M.D., considered to be the “father of modern corneal science,”

was presented to Alfonso to recognize his lifetime of teaching excellence in the field of cornea and external disease and contributions to the field. Dohlman has been a mentor and friend of Alfonso for more than 40 years.



SWARUP S. SWAMINATHAN, M.D., was recently named an Emerging Vision Scientist by the National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research. Selected for his innovative research, he was recognized for his work on the use of data science techniques in the diagnosis and monitoring of glaucomatous disease. Prior to the

COVID-19 pandemic, emerging scientists met with members of Congress to thank them for their essential support of the National Institutes of Health and National Eye Institute. This year, all meetings were conducted virtually.

Leadership and service were on display at the 2020 Florida Society of Ophthalmology (FSO) annual meeting. **GUILLERMO AMESCUA, M.D.**, received the John R. Brayton Jr., M.D., Leadership Award from president **SARAH WELLIK, M.D.** Amescua was recognized for his leadership and dedication to preserving the profession of ophthalmology. Bascom Palmer has enjoyed a long history of leadership within the FSO, beginning in 1948, when the Institute's namesake, **BASCOM H. PALMER, M.D.**, served as president of the organization, as have **STEPHEN G. SCHWARTZ, M.D., M.B.A.; KRISHNA KISHOR, M.D.; AND KARA M. CAVUOTO, M.D.** Also, currently serving on the Board of Directors is **RAQUEL GOLDHARDT, M.D.**, as vice-president of outreach.



Dr. Sarah Wellik

Congratulations to **KARA CAVUOTO, M.D.**, for receiving the 2020 University of Miami Faculty Senate Outstanding Teaching Award. Cavuoto serves as the director of medical student education in ophthalmology. In this role, she oversees all ophthalmology clerkships and pre-clinical graduate coursework and also advises University of Miami Miller School medical students applying for ophthalmology residency programs. She directs the ophthalmology rotations and elective classes for the Miller School students at Bascom Palmer and the

Miami Veteran's Medical Center. She is the first Bascom Palmer faculty member to receive this award, which recognizes a distinguished record of teaching at the University of Miami.

Dr. Kara Cavuoto



Grants Awarded



Congratulations to **TA CHEN PETER CHANG, M.D.**, on receiving a Clinical & Translational Science Institute (CTSI) Pilot Grant in the amount of \$40,000 to study congenital cataract disease clustering in Florida. This novel epidemiological study, in collaboration with geospatial epidemiologist Justin Stoler, Ph.D., from the Department of Geography, aims to identify spatiotemporal clustering, or "hot spots" of congenital cataracts, as a means of finding novel risk factors of this potentially devastating birth defect of the eye. Chang is also recruiting for an ongoing genetic study of early-onset primary open angle glaucoma (POAG) in the Haitian community with the purpose of identifying novel genes associated with the insidious, blinding eye disease. Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness worldwide, with early detection and management being the best way to prevent blindness. POAG disproportionately affects young Haitian individuals and is highly heritable. Many young Haitians with POAG present with severe vision loss, and a gene-based screening strategy may improve POAG detection and care. Supported by a 2021 Scientific Award Committee Interdisciplinary Team Science Pilot Program Grant and a 2021 Glaucoma Research Foundation Shaffer Grant, this study is a collaboration between Bascom Palmer and the Hussman Institute of Human Genomics. For more information on this study, please contact Chang at t.chang@med.miami.edu or Linda Celestin at lxc899@med.miami.edu.

Bascom Palmer is pleased to announce that it has received a \$22,500 grant from Fight for Sight to support research in exploring the role of different Wnt signaling mechanisms in optic nerve regeneration. The grant was awarded to **GANESWARA RAO MUSADA**, a postdoctoral candidate who conducts his research in the laboratory of Abigail Hackam, Ph.D. The research in Hackam's lab encompasses the fields of genetics and ophthalmology. Its focus is on understanding signaling mechanisms that contribute to retinal degeneration and optic nerve regrowth, through the use of cellular, molecular and bioinformatics analysis. Optic nerve damage from traumatic injury or optic neuropathies leads to death of retinal ganglion cells and blindness. The identification of potential therapeutic molecules that could regenerate optic nerve axons after injury will lead toward the development of treatment modalities for optic neuropathies. Wnt ligands are a family of proteins that play an essential role in axon growth and neurite extension during embryonic development. The goal of Musada's study is to investigate the pro-regenerative role of various Wnt ligands on optic nerve axons.

Protecting eyes following surgery

Thanks to the generosity of **Bascom Palmer's Optical Department**, our littlest patients are going home following eye surgery in properly fitted sunglasses to protect their eyes. To encourage the children to wear their new sunglasses, the surgical nurses present them on a sunglass-wearing stuffed animal that the children can hug and take home. We also thank the Beauty of Sight Foundation for donating the soft and cuddly animals.



Photorefractive keratectomy (PRK) and laser-assisted in situ keratomileusis (LASIK) are surgical procedures used to correct refractive errors, with approximately 600,000 surgeries performed in the United States each year. A proportion (10 - 20%) of individuals develop persistent ocular symptoms after refractive surgery, which are often characterized as dryness, burning, or aching. We currently cannot predict which individuals will develop persistent ocular symptoms and this limits the ability to deliver precision medicine: counseling individuals at risk not to have surgery or pretreating them with medications than can decrease the risk of persistent symptoms. To bridge this knowledge gap, in a National Eye Institute-funded study, **ANAT GALOR, M.D., M.S.P.H.**, and her research team will collect tear fluid from individuals before and after refractive surgery and attempt to identify prognostic and diagnostic biomarkers for persistent ocular symptoms after surgery.



ANAT GALOR, M.D., M.S.P.H., and her research team will collect tear fluid from individuals before and after refractive surgery and attempt to identify prognostic and diagnostic biomarkers for persistent ocular symptoms after surgery.

Galor and her team also received a grant from the U.S. Department of Defense to study the validity of ocular photosensitivity in individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI), a condition with devastating lifelong consequences. TBI is especially a significant health concern for service members and veterans both at times of peace and war. Photophobia, or extreme pain sensitivity to light, is one of the most distressing features of TBI as its occurrence results in high morbidity without effective treatment. A knowledge gap in the field is a psychophysical metric with which to assess photophobia. Bascom Palmer's Ophthalmic Biophysics Center developed an ocular photosensitivity analyzer to provide a valid and reliable assessment of pain threshold to light to aid in this research.



Dr. Hong Jiang

The Florida Department of Health announced that **HONG JIANG, M.D., PH.D.**, received a \$250,000 grant from the Ed and Ethel Moore Alzheimer's Disease Research Program. Jiang, a neuro-ophthalmologist and neurologist, is collaborating with David Loewenstein, Ph.D., and Rosie Cruiel, Psy.D., at the University of Miami Aging Center, and **JIANHUA WANG, M.D., PH.D.** The team will use advanced ophthalmic imaging to study the role of retinal microvascular and microstructural changes and their relations to cognitive function.



Dr. Jonathan Russell

Chief resident and retina and vitreous disease specialist, **JONATHAN F. RUSSELL, M.D., PH.D.**, received a grant from the VitreoRetinal Surgery Foundation (VRSF) to support a clinicopathologic study of specimens taken from eyes with a condition called myopic traction maculopathy. The VRSF supports research by funding awards for young investigators devoted to retinal diseases and research. **WILLIAM E. SMIDDY, M.D.**, served as the faculty sponsor and will present the findings at the annual Macula Society meeting.

SANJOY BHATTCHARYA, PH.D., has received a grant from the University of Miami to support travel for young scientists working within his laboratory to attend the XV Biennial Meeting of the Association for Ocular Pharmacology and Therapeutics. This conference brings together students, scientists and healthcare professionals from all disciplines who are developing new ways to treat eye diseases.

UM baseball players get innovative vision training



Three years ago, Norberto Lopez, a University of Miami assistant baseball coach who works with the hitters on the UM team, approached **NATALIE TOWNSEND, O.D.**, Bascom Palmer's director of sports vision, to build a program to improve baseball players' performance. Using various drills, Bascom Palmer specialists are working with players to improve hand-eye coordination, reaction time, visual processing and visual perception so that when a ball approaches home plate at speeds approaching 90 mph, the ball appears bigger and slower. This improves the ability to make contact and translates to a better batting average. "We feel it has positively impacted the offense and our data supports it," said Townsend. "Thanks to the donors who have funded this initiative, we enter the 2021 baseball season with high expectations. There is a lot of talent. We hope in June we are headed to Omaha for the College World Series to win the national title: we don't want anything less!"

WELCOME NEW FACULTY

We are pleased to announce four new members have joined the full-time faculty of the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. The Department of Ophthalmology's physicians and scientific investigators are committed to advancing the practices of ophthalmology through innovation in therapeutics, diagnostics, and vision research.

STEPHANIE M. LLOP

SANTIAGO, M.D., a uveitis and ocular immunology specialist, joins the faculty as an assistant professor of clinical ophthalmology. She graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Puerto Rico with a degree in biology, followed by a medical degree, also *magna cum*



laude, from the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine, where she was inducted into the Alpha Omega

Alpha Honor Medical Society. Llop then completed a residency in ophthalmology at the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine followed by a fellowship in uveitis and ocular immunology at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, affiliated with Harvard Medical School. Prior to joining Bascom Palmer, Llop was an assistant professor in ophthalmology at New York Eye and Ear Infirmary of Mount Sinai, where she also served as director for the uveitis and ocular immunology fellowship program. Her research interests include the medical and surgical management of uveitis including immunosuppressive therapy. Llop is available for consultation regarding uveitis, cataract, and general eye care.

NATHAN W. BLESSING, M.D.

a specialist in ophthalmic plastic and reconstructive surgery, joins the faculty in April as an assistant professor of clinical ophthalmology. Blessing received a bachelor of science degree in biology, *summa cum laude*, from Emory University, and a medical degree with Special



Distinction, from the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine. He is a member of the Alpha Omega Alpha

Honor Medical Society and the Phi Beta Kappa Academic Honor Society. Blessing then completed a residency in ophthalmology and a fellowship in ophthalmic plastic and reconstructive surgery at Bascom Palmer. Following his training in Miami, he returned home to Oklahoma where he joined the faculty of Dean McGee Eye Institute as a clinical assistant professor. He is a member of the American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery and is deeply involved in international service, having traveled to Ethiopia, Swaziland, and Argentina to teach and to provide patient care. Blessing is available for consultation on all aspects of oculoplastic surgery including aesthetic and functional eyelid and facial surgery, nasolacrimal surgery, orbital oncology, botulinum toxin and dermal filler injections for facial rejuvenation, pediatric oculoplastics, skin cancer reconstruction, orbital trauma repair, thyroid eye disease, and revisional surgery.

STEFAN KURTENBACH, PH.D.

joins the faculty as a research assistant professor of ophthalmology. A post-doctoral associate and assistant scientist in Bascom Palmer's Ocular Oncology Laboratory, Kurtenbach's research focuses on how genomic aberrations and epigenetic changes



foster tumor development. He received three degrees from Ruhr University Bochum, Germany: a bachelor of

science in biochemistry, a master of science in biochemistry, and a doctor of philosophy in cell physiology, *summa cum laude*. Prior to joining Bascom Palmer, he completed a molecular and cellular neuroscience postdoctoral fellowship at York University, Canada. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors including a career development award from the Melanoma Research Foundation, A Cure in Sight/Jack Odell and John Dages Research Award for new personalized treatment strategies for metastatic diseases in uveal melanoma, and an AACR-Ocular Melanoma Foundation Fellowship. Kurtenbach also serves as the director of the Interdisciplinary Stem Cell Institute at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

HONG YU, PH.D., a scientific investigator focused on mitochondrial diseases, joins the faculty as a research assistant professor. Yu received three degrees in microbiology from Nankai University, China: a bachelor of science; a master of science; and a doctor of



philosophy. She then completed a National Institutes of Health-supported postdoctoral fellowship

in cancer and stem cell research at the University of Pennsylvania. In 2009, she joined Bascom Palmer as an associate scientist, where she worked with John R. Guy, M.D. in mitochondrial gene therapy on Leber's hereditary optic neuropathy (LHON), neurogenic muscle weakness, ataxia, retinitis pigmentosa, and Leigh syndrome. She continues her and Dr. Guy's work following Dr. Guy's death in 2020. Guy was one of the world's leading experts in the field of neuro-ophthalmology who pioneered gene therapy research for the treatment of LHON. At the time of his death he held four awards including two R01 basic research awards which have been transferred to Yu. She also serves as principal investigator on the modification of mitochondrial DNA using targeted CRISPR/Cas9 for the Retina Research Foundation.

Endowed chairs are the highest honors that can be awarded at a research university. Bascom Palmer Eye Institute's worldwide leadership in research, education, and clinical care would not be possible without the generous support of donors who share the Institute's passionate commitment to excellence in ophthalmology. We recognize the newest chair, Sonia H. Yoo, M.D., for her remarkable accomplishments at Bascom Palmer.

Sonia H. Yoo, M.D.

Greentree Hickman Chair in Ophthalmology



“With the resources generated from the chair and from my practice at Bascom Palmer over the past two decades, I hope to continue to improve patient outcomes in cataract and refractive surgery. Not only do I look forward to the day of getting patients to see 20/15 or better consistently, but I also look forward to improving quality of vision testing and outcomes.”

– Dr. Sonia Yoo

A specialist in cornea and external diseases, LASIK and laser vision correction, Yoo has been a principal investigator on a number of clinical trials and testing of new intraocular lenses and devices for cataract surgery and imaging. She serves as the co-medical director of surgical services at Bascom Palmer, as well as director of corneal imaging. Her extensive experience and numerous publications on commercial and research-grade optical coherence tomography (OCT) systems have qualified her to lead testing of imaging systems developed at the Institute for corneal and anterior segment imaging, including high-resolution spectral domain OCT.

Yoo served as one of the lead investigators in the clinical development and evaluation of femtosecond laser-assisted cataract surgery. Additionally, she served as the lead clinical investigator in efforts to develop intraoperative OCT in order to assist and guide anterior segment surgery with the goal to bring this technology to the operating room to guide various types of anterior segment surgery in real time. These studies have provided data that led to U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval of the device. In 2018, Yoo was named to the *Ophthalmologist* Power List as one of the world's 100 most influential people in ophthalmology. She is the recipient of many awards including the Irwin H. Lepow Dean's Award, the Janet M. Glasgow Memorial Achievement Citation from Case Western University, and the Founders' Award from the International Society of Refractive Surgery.

The Bascom Palmer Society

Recognized as the George E. Merrick Society at the University of Miami

Honoring the Institute's most generous benefactors whose gifts exceed \$1 million, the Bascom Palmer Society was created in memory of the Institute's namesake, Bascom Headon Palmer, M.D., an ophthalmologist who pioneered eye care in Miami.

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Recognized as The Bowman Foster Ashe Society at the University of Miami

Members of the Norton Society have generously supported Bascom Palmer with gifts totaling \$500,000 – \$999,999. This society honors the vision and leadership of Edward W.D. Norton, M.D., the Institute’s founding chairman.



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**In loving memory*

Donations listed as of 10/31/2020

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This society recognizes those individuals who ensure Bascom Palmer Eye Institute's legacy by making the Institute a beneficiary of their estate or financial plans. Please let us know if you have included Bascom Palmer in your estate plans so we may recognize your investment in our future.

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Donations listed as of 10/31/2020

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Thank you to the members of the Women's Guild of 2020. This is an esteemed group of women whose membership fees support vision research and who work together as ambassadors for Bascom Palmer in our communities.

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Philanthropy Fuels the Future

The number of endowed chairs continues to grow at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. As the highest academic award that the University of Miami can bestow on a faculty member, an endowed chair lasts in perpetuity. It is an esteemed honor to the named holder of the appointment as well as an enduring tribute to the donors. With these newest gifts, Bascom Palmer will have 25 endowed chairs or professorships.



Gordon R. Miller Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology

“Gordy Miller was a respected ophthalmologist but even more he was an exceptional person.” “His warmth and kindness were an integral part of his persona.” “Gordy loved the University of Miami and the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute.” These are a few endearing comments used to describe Gordon R. Miller, M.D., who passed away in October 2020 at the age of 85.



Miller began his career in ophthalmology at Bascom Palmer in 1960 because of Edward W. D. Norton, M.D., Bascom Palmer’s founder and

“Chief” of the division of ophthalmology at the University of Miami School of Medicine at the time. Miller completed a residency and fellowship at Bascom Palmer, and following his service as a Captain in the United States Army, he returned to the Institute to become chief resident under “The Chief.” “I like to think that I was his favorite resident,” Miller once said with his characteristic smile. “Dr. Norton was like a guiding light for me.” Before his death, Miller provided a bequest to Bascom Palmer to create the Gordon R. Miller, M.D., Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology. As he said at the time, “This gift is a tribute to the Chief and this great institution.” The chairholder will be announced at a later date.

New endowed chair supports glaucoma research

The recently established **MARY LEE AND RICHARD E. BASTIN CHAIR IN OPHTHALMOLOGY** will propel advances that positively impact patients with glaucoma. It will support novel glaucoma research that includes refining statistical methods, identifying novel risk factors, and improving care and treatment for patients suffering from this disease. The Bastin’s are longtime friends of Bascom Palmer, and have supported research and education at other institutions of higher learning. Their involvement in the South Florida community includes several civic and non-profit organizations. The chairholder will be announced at a later date.



Donors support vision care for underserved children

Kids go to school with backpacks full of textbooks, notebooks, and pencils, but many lack an essential element for academic success: annual vision care. Underserved pediatric patients in Palm Beach County (newborn to age 18) will soon have access to vision screenings, eyeglasses and sports goggles, chronic care, and eye surgery thanks to a generous gift from Bruce and Cynthia Sherman to establish the **BRUCE AND CYNTHIA SHERMAN PALM BEACH VISION HEALTH INITIATIVE**.

“One third of the information coming into a child’s brain comes through their eyes,” said Eduardo C. Alfonso, M.D., Bascom Palmer’s director and chair. “It is very important that we intervene early in a child’s life and do vision screenings. If we do so, we can make a child’s life that much better.”

“As a former kindergarten teacher, I’ve seen the importance of sight in igniting a child’s spark of curiosity and pursuit of knowledge,” said Cynthia Sherman. “That’s why Bruce and I are thrilled to support the critically important mission of the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, helping more children protect and preserve their sight for a lifetime of learning.”

An anonymous donor has recently given \$5 million to establish a **RETINAL RESEARCH ENDOWMENT** to support continued research and advances in retinal diseases and macular degeneration. “This monumental gift will allow Bascom Palmer researchers to remain at the forefront of clinical and basic science research on retinal diseases. Macular degeneration is the leading cause of visual loss in seniors and this gift will greatly enhance our efforts in finding better treatments for this blinding disease. Other target areas of research include diabetic retinopathy, hereditary diseases, retinopathy of prematurity, and many other diseases involving the retina,” said Harry W. Flynn, Jr., M.D., the J. Donald Gass Chair in Ophthalmology. ■

If you do not wish to receive further communications from the University of Miami Medical Programs, please send your request by email to: medoptout@med.miami.edu or mail your request to UHealth Privacy, P.O. Box 019132 (M-879), Miami, Florida 33101. Be sure to include the following: name, address, phone number and email address. Only complete requests can be processed. You may receive additional communications during the processing of your request.

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Miami, Florida 33136
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Toll free in USA 800-329-7000

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Palm Beach Gardens
Florida 33418
561-515-1500

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239-659-3937

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Excellence in Medical Education *page 22*