

Robison V. Paul Chan, MD, MSc, FACS

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1. What inspired you to become a retina specialist?

Two things inspired me to become a retina specialist: my parents and my professional mentors. Both of my parents were ophthalmologists, and I spent a lot of time as a child going to meetings and learning

through osmosis. This is not to say that my parents forced medicine upon me—they were open to my doing anything.

I have been quite lucky in terms of the people I have known over the years. William E. Benson, MD, at Wills Eye Hospital, for instance, had a big influence on me. He took the time to discuss his research projects with me, and he introduced me to several residents and fellows, and these relationships helped to guide my direction.

Weill Cornell Medical College, which has a strong history of retina, was where I did my residency, and retina seemed to suit my personality. Particularly in a field like retina, it is the people who mentor you early on who have the greatest impact on your future.

2. How did you decide to specialize in pediatrics?

By accident, really. I was offered a faculty position at Cornell. The position did not specifically focus on pediatric retina. I wasn't planning on pursuing a career in pediatric retina at that time, mainly because I didn't have significant exposure to it. I trained with Thomas Lee, MD, who was and continues to be a big influence on me because he is such a good mentor and his work focused so much on pediatric retina patients.

I've been very fortunate to have collaborators and friends like Michael F. Chiang, MD, a pediatric ophthalmologist; Lihteh Wu, MD; Maria Ana Martinez-Castellanos, MD; and Hugo Quiroz-Mercado, MD. I worked with Hugo in Mexico after my fellowship, where he immediately got me involved with projects on the treatment of retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) with bevacizumab (Avastin, Genentech). This experience had a tremendous impact on my career in pediatric retina.

I've also served under wonderful chairs like D. Jackson Coleman, MD, and Donald J. D'Amico, MD, who created a supportive and fun environment that encouraged me to embrace this discipline.

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3. What influenced your decision to focus on education?

Education has always mattered to me. Our legacies depend on those we help, both in terms of the patients we heal and the people we train. Education is the most important tool a physician has. Even if you lose every material item in your life due to some great catastrophe, you always have your skill and your craft. This is something I learned from my grandfather, who was also a physician.

Education doesn't occur only in the classroom—it is happening all the time. Consider what we have in this digital age; a tweet, recorded lecture, or surgical video has the potential to reach massive numbers of people via the Internet.

In pediatric retina, there is a need for more education. As a niche specialty, we should increase our efforts to educate our trainees and colleagues regarding management of pediatric retinal disorders. Education does not end when formal schooling does. I was lucky to have academic role models and mentors during my training like Joan W. Miller, MD; Evangelos S. Gragoudas, MD; Ivana Kim, MD; James C. Tsai, MD; and Alexander J. Brucker, MD, to support me and push me to improve myself even after my fellowship ended. If I can do the same for my students and colleagues, then I would feel successful. I think that training and being a good mentor is essential to improving the quality of care we provide to our patients.

4. What are the things you most enjoy about practicing in the retina subspecialty?

My parents always told me that retina specialists are some of the finest doctors in ophthalmology, and they were right. We have an incredible community of great physicians, leaders, and scientists.

It is also a very visual and beautiful profession, in that you can look at the retina or even a picture of it—whether it is an optical coherence tomography scan or a fundus photograph—and make a diagnosis. There is an artistic quality to our work that you may not be able to find in other fields. Additionally, there is the great pleasure that comes from helping patients, particularly through surgery. We often care for patients who are in the greatest need, and we can make a life-changing impact in our patients' lives. We can deliver tangible results that greatly improve a patient's quality of life.

I've made a lot of great friends from all around the world. These friendships are 1 of many reasons why I find being a retina specialist so much fun.

5. What is something that we do not know about you that might surprise our readers?

I'm named after 2 ophthalmologists and a purple panda bear, "Paul" from "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." "Robison" is for Robison Harley, MD (of Harley's *Pediatric Ophthalmology*), and "Vernon" is for Vernon Wong, MD (creator of what is now called Ozurdex). Both were close

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friends of my parents. However, the name I go by, "Paul," was my sister's addition because she couldn't pronounce "Robison" or "Vernon."

Athletics have always been a big part of my life. I was recruited out of high school to wrestle in college and ultimately ended up playing rugby at a high level. After college, I considered a career in secondary education because I wanted to teach high school. Ultimately, I chose medicine. I love being in an academic environment, and education and teaching has been a constant theme in my life. Also, something I didn't realize until I started my residency, is that the Chan wrist rest, which many of us use during surgery, was originally designed by my father. ■