

PEARLS, AWARDS, AND THE RETINA GAMES



A review of the 22nd Retina Fellows Forum.

BY FONG MAY CHEW, FRCOPHTH, MBBS, BSC

The all too familiar greeting of, “it’s been ages!” echoed around the hall as the 22nd Retina Fellows Forum commenced in Chicago on December 3, 2021, after an in-person hiatus of 2 years. The event was led by esteemed course co-directors Carl C. Awh, MD, FASRS; David R. Chow, MD, FASRS; and Tarek S. Hassan, MD, FASRS, who were joined by a robust faculty, including Thomas A. Albin, MD, FASRS; Dean Elliott, MD, FASRS; Sunir J. Garg, MD, FASRS; Daniel F. Martin, MD, FASRS; Aleksandra V. Rachitskaya, MD, FASRS; Alan J. Ruby, MD, FASRS; Amy C. Scheffler, MD, FASRS; and Rishi P. Singh, MD, FASRS (Figure 1). The senior vitreoretinal fellows were in for a weekend of fun—all in the name of education, of course.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

The event kicked off with various panels, including Uveitis for the Retina Specialist presented by Dr. Albin; Tumors for the Retina Specialist presented by Dr. Scheffler; and Current and Future Management of Wet AMD presented by Dr. Singh. These panels provided the fellows with plenty of chances to informally pose questions—a difficult task in a more traditional conference setting. Fellow case presentations followed, which varied from surgical extraction of an intraocular worm, thanks to Riyaz Y. Bhikoo, MBChB, FRANZCO, to an unusual case of uveal effusion and pachychoroid presented by Talisa De Carlo, MD, to a fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH) diagnosis of T-cell vitreoretinal lymphoma presented by Kevin Ferenchak, MD. As the first evening came to an end, we were given a hint of what was to come the next day—Squid Game.

RETINA GAMES

The Fellows Forum always includes a fun and interactive game component. This year, Dr. Hassan had the fellows divide into teams that were led by a faculty member and compete against each other in a survival-of-the-fittest style reminiscent of the popular TV show, Squid



Figure 1. The esteemed faculty at the 22nd Retina Fellows Forum in Chicago. Top row, left to right: Rishi P. Singh, MD, FASRS; Thomas A. Albin, MD, FASRS; and Alan J. Ruby, MD, FASRS. Bottom row, left to right: Dean Elliott, MD, FASRS; Amy C. Scheffler, MD, FASRS; Carl C. Awh, MD, FASRS; Daniel F. Martin, MD, FASRS; Tarek S. Hassan, MD, FASRS; David R. Chow, MD, FASRS; Aleksandra V. Rachitskaya, MD, FASRS; and Sunir J. Garg, MD, FASRS.

Game. To keep us on our toes, the question rounds were interspersed throughout the day, and you had to be there to participate!

The morning commenced with Dr. Ruby’s session on retinal detachment and proliferative vitreoretinopathy (PVR); the panel discussed the role of off-label intravitreal methotrexate for reducing the risk of PVR and shared pearls regarding the intricacies of PVR surgery. Lectures were combined with the Retina Games competition, which included anagrams (the entire room soon realized senior vitreoretinal fellows were not good at these!).

This was followed by a macular surgery panel led by Dr. Awh that showcased new instruments to maximize safety and efficiency during macular surgery. Next, a panel discussed the management of diabetic macular edema and proliferative diabetic retinopathy, led by Dr. Garg. The issue of patient compliance was discussed,

RETINA FELLOWS FORUM



Figure 2. Tarek S. Hassan, MD, FASRS, presented The Retina Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award to surprise guest, Kirk H. Packo, MD, FACS.

which is an important factor when considering the best treatment plan for patients with diabetes.

A pre-meeting questionnaire showed that the senior fellows were not confident in discussing with patients the future management of dry AMD. Thus, Dr. Singh reviewed the drugs in development for the management of dry AMD, including the OAKS and DERBY studies, the GOLDEN study, and the anti-C5 study.

KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON

The distinguished guest speaker for the 22nd Retina Fellows Forum was Dr. Martin. His inspiring talk on how to achieve academic success in the field of retina gave us much food for thought. The first 5 years of your career will shape the rest of your career, he said, and it is important to be able to manage change and career low points. Teamwork, time management, and mentors are all crucial in the recipe for success.

Retina legend Kirk H. Packo, MD, FACS, made a surprise appearance at this year's meeting, much to the joy of everyone there. Dr. Hassan presented Dr. Packo with the Retina Lifetime Achievement Award from the Retina Hall of Fame (Figure 2). During his acceptance speech, Dr. Packo touched upon many things, including the privilege of practicing retina, the ability to contribute his thoughts/hypotheses/observations to the field, and the collegiality that is the retina group. His inspiring words made us realize how privileged we are to be sitting in that room.

One of the biggest concerns among the graduating group of senior vitreoretinal fellows was the question of private equity and the role it plays in our future careers. The Business of Retina session led by Dr. Ruby was extremely useful, as the faculty provided advice on signing contracts, life insurance, and life after a group practice has



Figure 3. The winning team of the Saturday night bowling competition, led by Rishi P. Singh, MD, FASRS.

been bought by a private equity partner.

As the sessions drew to a close, we moved to a more informal setting, and Dr. Awl discussed starting your career in the real world. His presentation, interspersed with input from the faculty, was a practical discussion of the nitty-gritty, like how to choose where to practice, what to expect when it comes to patient interactions, and how to handle bias.

THE CLOSING CEREMONY

At the end of the day, the Retina Games contest culminated in single-person elimination rounds with questions that involved problem solving, pattern recognition, and probability. The two finalists battled it out at the bowling alley later that night.

The bowling competition, always the highlight of the weekend, concluded with an awards ceremony. Dr. Ruby emerged as the best male bowler, the best female bowler was Dayna Izzo with Oculus Surgical, Dr. Singh's team won the best combined team score (Figure 3), and Rohan Jalalizadeh, MD, from The Retina Institute in St. Louis, emerged a victorious senior fellow in the Retina Games.

The ceremony marked the end of yet another successful Retina Fellows Forum. It was a truly inspiring weekend that gave all of the graduating fellows much to consider when shaping their long career paths ahead. We thank the faculty for investing their time and sharing their knowledge and advice not just this weekend but throughout the years. ■

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