

# DRIVING CHANGE WITH DATA

BY KATHERINE E. TALCOTT, MD, AND MATTHEW A. CUNNINGHAM, MD, FASRS, GUEST MEDICAL EDITORS



Welcome to *Retina Today's* annual issue dedicated to diversity and inclusion. While many might consider this

a softer, less tangible topic, we retina specialists politely disagree. In fact, diversity in retina has become nearly as data-driven as our clinical trials, and that data is what informs the continual push toward improvement for both patients and practitioners.

For example, a study published in *JAMA Ophthalmology* in January explored language concordance between patients and physicians,<sup>1</sup> a metric known to improve health outcomes.<sup>2,3</sup> The researchers found that, within 32 academic centers, the average language coverage was between 32% and 55%, depending on the region. Even at our best, nearly half of patients struggle to understand their ophthalmologist. The authors call for “targeted workforce strategies to potentially reduce these disparities.”<sup>1</sup> With concrete data like that, we can work toward solving the problem.

In this issue, we highlight other data that’s helping reshape our field. Melissa Yuan, MD; Eugenia C. Greig, MD; and Carolyn K. Pan, MD, share updates on female representation on the podium (spoiler: it’s slowly improving), while Alice C. Lorch, MD, MPH, describes outcomes from a teleretinal screening program designed to close the gap in diabetic eye care for underserved patients. Jeremiah Brown Jr, MD, MS, FASRS, and Genevieve Espinoza, BA, COA, OSC, review the ELEVATUM trial, which intentionally enrolled underrepresented patients to better understand

the clinical effect of treatment for patients with diabetic macular edema.

Even diversity issues you wouldn’t think could have data *do*, in fact, have studies calling for change. For example, Cohen et al explored trends in ophthalmology residency stipends, showing stark differences between stipends and the cost of living in certain areas.<sup>4</sup> They concluded that applicants can use the data to objectively evaluate compensation packages between programs—and programs can use it to inform their own decisions regarding residency compensation.<sup>4</sup> Very useful information. Of course, it’s also crucial to address such disparities in practice, and I (K.E.T) moderated a wonderful roundtable discussion with Yoshihiro Yonekawa, MD, and Adrienne W. Scott, MD, about ways to support fellows facing challenges due to their economic circumstances. Within that article, Jayanth Sridhar, MD, a coauthor on the residency stipend paper, also offers advice for those mentoring medical students and residents.

Our field has come so far in terms of diversity and inclusion, but the data also show persistent disparities that need our attention. If we encourage diversity from the very beginning, we will one day have an inclusive community of clinicians who can meet each and every patient where they are. We cannot wait to see the positive outcomes from that. ■

1. Borges S, DeLuca NJ, Pereira VA, Borges V, Cavuoto KM. Language accessibility at select academic ophthalmology centers across US metropolitan areas [published online ahead of print January 15, 2026]. *JAMA Ophthalmol*.

2. Holm J, Cuevas A, Wang VH, Pagán JA, Silver D. Experiences of patient-provider concordance in healthcare among All of Us participants, 2017-2023. *Patient Educ Couns*. 2025;139:109258.

3. Otte SV. Improved patient experience and outcomes: Is patient-provider concordance the key? *J Patient Exp*. 2022;9:23743735221103033.

4. Cohen SA, Sridhar J, Tseng VL. Geographic trends in ophthalmology resident physician compensation and cost-of-living expenses. *JAMA Ophthalmol*. 2024;142(8):761-767.

## A NEW FACE IN *RETINA TODAY*



We are thrilled to announce that Lejla Vajzovic, MD, FASRS, has joined *Retina Today* as an Associate Medical Editor. Her leadership, expertise in the clinic and OR, and robust network will be integral to *Retina Today's* growth, as we find new ways to educate our readers on the ever-changing landscape of retina care.

Dr. Vajzovic is a vitreoretinal surgeon and tenured Professor of Ophthalmology, Biomedical Engineering, and Pediatrics at Duke University School of Medicine. She serves as Director of Duke's Vitreoretinal Fellowship and Continuing Medical Education

programs. A renowned specialist in both adult and pediatric retina, she is a principal investigator for numerous clinical trials and Course Director for the international Duke Fellows' Advanced Vitreous Surgery Course, the Duke Advanced Vitreous Surgery Course, and the Advances in Pediatric Retina Course.

Welcome, Dr. Vajzovic!

As part of *Retina Today's* next chapter, we've also promoted Robert L. Avery, MD, to Co-Chief Medical Editor.

We are excited to see where the next 20 years takes us!

- Rebecca Hepp, MA, Editor-in-Chief