

Charles W. Mango, MD

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You are a founding member of the Vit-Buckle Society (VBS). In what direction do you think the VBS will grow in the coming years?

The VBS has been an incredible experience. We started our fledgling society by hosting small dinner meetings to talk about surgical cases. We structured these dinners to foster freewheeling back-and-forth discussions, creating a comfortable environment where doctors were free to speak their minds. Those early meetings built great camaraderie among our members. Fast-forward to the present, and we just finished our second annual standalone meeting, which continues to capture the excitement of those beginning years. The VBS executive committee and meeting planners deserve all of the credit for forging the trend-setting look and feel of our annual meetings. For the future, we will continue to come up with fresh ideas: new ways to present topics, new ways to synthesize relationships with industry, and new ways to further retina fellowship participation. The VBS has its best years ahead of it!

What led you to pursue ophthalmology as a profession?

It was a multistep discovery which began in my childhood. My father is a practicing retina surgeon, and he instilled in me an interest in eyes and surgery. I used to go to the OR to observe his cases. I remember thinking this was really a cool thing to do and something I would like to do when I grew up. In medical school, I forced my mind to be open to all disciplines. However, I kept coming back to the field of ophthalmology. I believed it was the perfect balance of office-based practice and surgery; I still believe that. I was eventually guided into the field of retina because of the challenging cases and the variety of patients that we take care of. My fellowship in vitreoretinal surgery at the Jules Stein Eye Institute at UCLA was the single best experience in my medical training, and it cemented in me a lifelong love for the field.

What has been your most rewarding experience as a physician?

My most rewarding experience as a physician is mentoring. Our field is unique in the amount of skills

transferred one-to-one while sitting at a microscope. You really can have a great impact on someone's training in that sense. I have had the privilege of being involved with the retina surgical fellowship at Weill Cornell Medical College over the past 8 years. Fellowship training is the best because we focus on the high-level details that interest us the most. Fellows continue to play a big role in my life long after their official training is complete. Several of the people I trained in fellowship still call me for advice when they are practicing on their own. They email me difficult cases and ask for guidance. They make it a point to meet in-person at our many meetings. They become colleagues with whom I continue to share ideas, but, more important, they become my friends.

Tell our readers about an early experience in your medical training that had a great effect on the way you practice today.

In my third year of medical school, during clinical rotations, I was introduced to a wide spectrum of doctors and practice methods. I noticed that some doctors had a poor bedside manner. Although retina specialists can diagnose a patient with ease, they often have a difficult time putting patients at ease. I found that an emotional bond between the patient and physician greatly helps the healing process. I try to make a connection with each of my patients, whether it is about family, sports, or hobbies. I try to get to know each patient as an individual. Relationship-building benefits both the doctor and patient, especially when I am recommending sticking a needle in their eye.

What do you enjoy doing when you are not in the office?

I have been an avid bird-watcher for years. Believe it or not, bird-watching and ophthalmology are complementary: They both require the use of exquisite optics and a knack for looking at details. I live near Central Park in New York City, which is a surprisingly great place for bird watching. Hiking and camping are high on my list of things to do as well. Most important, I love spending time with my wife, Cheryl, and our 2 young children. We are blessed that our kids are great travelers. We have not had a relaxing trip in years, but at least it is always an adventure! ■