JENNIFER I. LIM, MD

WHEN DID YOU FIRST FALL IN LOVE WITH RETINA?

One of the reasons I chose to become an ophthalmologist was because of my fascination with the myriad systemic diseases that have retinal manifestations. I remember performing direct ophthalmoscopy examinations as a medical student and looking intently at the retina for clues that might indicate systemic conditions.

As a second-year resident, I realized my love of all things retina when I was on my retina rotation with Morton F. Goldberg, MD, who was chairman at the University of Illinois Eye and Ear Infirmary. He noticed my interest and suggested that I consider pursuing a retina fellowship. Until then, I was considering a glaucoma fellowship based on my work with Jon M. Ruderman, MD, who was my mentor during my Northwestern Medical School senior elective.

I then embarked on a combined retina/glaucoma project with Norman P. Blair, MD, and Eve J. Higginbotham, SM, MD. I soon realized that I relished the ability to treat and "cure" proliferative diseases such as proliferative diabetic retinopathy and proliferative sickle cell retinopathy with laser therapy (yes, no anti-VEGF agents back then). I enjoyed assisting on retina surgery cases and witnessing the restoration of sight. For me, retina represented the most complex problems in ophthalmology, and I relished the challenge of treating and restoring vision for patients with those conditions.

WHICH PERSONALITY TRAITS BEST SUIT A DOCTOR FOR A CAREER IN RETINA?

In order to be successful in retina, one must be an astute observer, meticulous and methodical during an eye examination, and accurate in recording observed findings. Tenacity, good judgment, dexterity, and perseverance are attributes that make a good retina surgeon. An affable, kind, and empathic/sympathetic person can best relate to patients with sight-threatening diseases.

TELL US ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF RETINA DOCTORS STAYING IN TOUCH WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ON BOTH THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVELS.

Legislators are often unaware of the great strides we have made in preventing blindness and restoring vision, in no small part due to research funding. When retinal physicians explain the influence of studies such as the DRCR.net protocol studies, the ETDRS, and the AREDS, members of Congress become aware of how these sight-saving studies affect their constituents.

Retinal physicians must educate members of Congress about the extensive residency and fellowship training required to perform safely and effectively, as such an understanding affects their decisions about expansion of scope of practice for optometry.

Jennifer I. Lim, MD, and her family in Machu Pichu in the summer of 2017.

Communication about patient care that may be affected by legislation is also important. For example, after lawmakers learned about the importance of immediate access to compounded drugs in the office to treat choroidal neovascularization or endophthalmitis, prospective legislation regarding prescriptions for compounded drugs was changed. This was because lawmakers realized that scenarios that may result in blindness could exist if a bill requiring prescriptions to obtain compounded drugs became law. In this case, a little education went a long way.

HOW DO YOU ASSUAGE THE FEARS OF A PATIENT WHO HAS LEARNED THAT HIS OR HER SIGHT MAY BE THREATENED?

I first reassure the patient that we are going to work together as a team to try our best to prevent permanent visual loss. I then present the latest relevant research, information, or clinical data to provide an idea of the odds of various outcomes. I always tell patients that I am going to do the best I can for them. Depending on their age, I may let them know I am treating them as I would my own parent, sibling, or child. I always ask several times if they have any questions before, during, and after my discussion about their particular sight-threatening condition.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE LOCATION FOR A CONFERENCE?

My favorite US location is Southern California, near the ocean. I have many relatives and friends in the area, and it is always a treat to see them. The scenery is gorgeous, and cultural opportunities abound (all the foods, museums, and natural parks!). My family and I used to live there, so we have great memories and favorite places to revisit. ■

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- Financial disclosure: None