

LEJLA VAJZOVIC, MD

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE THE RETINA SUBSPECIALTY?

When I was in medical school at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science, I worked with Jonathan Holmes, MD, a pediatric ophthalmologist who studies retinopathy of prematurity. During my time doing research with him, I worked in his lab dissecting the retinas of mice. This exposure to microsurgery in an animal model inspired me to pursue a surgical field. My attraction and ultimate decision to specialize in retina began and was solidified during my residency at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute.

WHAT ASPECTS OF PRACTICING RETINA APPEAL MOST TO YOU?

I never really had a set plan of which subspecialty of ophthalmology I wanted to enter. As I described earlier, I decided to pursue retina only after interacting with my incredible mentors at Bascom Palmer. Retina appealed to me for a few reasons. There are always challenging diagnoses to be figured out, and I appreciate that challenge.

Another aspect of retina that appeals to me is the surgical side. We get to use amazing technology that is continually evolving to help us repair our patients' retinal conditions. I was also drawn to the microsurgery aspect of retina. I enjoy paying attention to fine detail, which, of course, is needed when performing vitreoretinal surgery.

WHAT AREAS OF RESEARCH IN RETINA ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT?

There are several very exciting areas of research in retina. I am most excited about the current OCT angiography (OCTA) research. I am interested in how the information gathered with OCTA imaging can be used to better treat our patients.

When OCT was first introduced, we were skeptical of how helpful it would be. In the end, it became a vital tool in retina clinics. I think OCTA will be the next go-to method we use to understand the vasculature in the posterior pole. Because many retinal conditions involve the vasculature, this technology may prove to be an extremely useful tool that can allow us to diagnose and treat retinal diseases earlier.

PLEASE TALK ABOUT YOUR WORK WITH INTRAOPERATIVE OCT.

I am very much involved with the development of the next-generation intraoperative OCT imaging devices with my Duke Eye Center colleagues and the Duke University biomedical engineering team. We are



Lejla Vajzovic, MD, with her niece and two daughters at Jahorina Mountain in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

continuing to advance intraoperative OCT technology to allow better visualization of tissue and increased opportunity for precision during surgery. We are currently studying subretinal delivery of therapies such as stem cells or gene therapy and how intraoperative OCT technology can help us to be more precise in that surgical setting.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT TEACHING?

I love witnessing my students' growth from the first day of their fellowship to completion. It's exciting to see how much they grow as both surgeons and people, and with each one it is like watching my children grow. I feel very excited and proud when I see my current and former fellows accomplishing their goals, starting practices, receiving awards, teaching the next generations, etc. ■

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