

EHAB N. EL-RAYES, MD, PhD

WHEN AND HOW DID YOU REALIZE YOU WANTED TO SPECIALIZE IN RETINA?

When I entered medical school, I was planning to be a neurosurgeon. I was drawn to the complexity of the human brain and neural tissue. It wasn't until the later stages of medical school and internship that I decided to shift to ophthalmology. During my residency in ophthalmology, my interest in neural tissue and its complexity was piqued once more when I was able to touch a retina while performing a ruptured globe repair. At that moment, I realized I was dealing with the most complicated part of the eye, and something in me was eager to continue working with this challenging and complex tissue.

WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A FOUNDER OF THE ARAB AFRICAN SOCIETY OF RETINA SPECIALISTS (AASRS) BEEN LIKE?

The story of the AASRS begins with the Cairo Retina Meeting. I have held the Cairo Retina Meeting in Cairo every 2 years since 2002. It began as a local meeting with international faculty but garnered international recognition over the years. I realized that it was time to create a society to represent the Middle East and Africa. So, in 2008, I invited representatives from most of the Middle Eastern and African countries to participate in the AASRS. Since that time, the Cairo Retina Meeting has also served as the annual meeting for the AASRS. The AASRS exposes members of retina societies in the region to the rest of the world. It is continuing to grow and collaborate with the international community, and I am looking forward to its becoming one of the largest retina societies in the world.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR WORK ON SUPRACHOROIDAL SURGICAL APPROACHES. WHAT LED YOU TO EXPERIMENT WITH THIS DIRECTION?

I became interested in suprachoroidal space surgery because I was trying to fulfill unmet needs in myopic macular hole management. I realized that I could move the choroid to support only the retina. The first time I attempted this, I used a pediatric angiocatheter to enter the suprachoroidal space and inject a filler between the choroid and the sclera to move the choroid forward, creating a suprachoroidal macular buckle. The attempt was successful, but I needed a smaller catheter. Several months later, in collaboration with MedOne Surgical, I developed a smaller, illuminated catheter that helped to improve the safety of this procedure. I then realized that, if I am able to close a macular hole using this technique, I can also use it to close a peripheral retinal break. I also looked into the possibility of drug delivery into the suprachoroidal space. I worked for years exploring the potential of this space as a slow release reservoir for drugs and an approach to cellular



Dr. El-Rayès at his desk in Cairo.

delivery. I think the suprachoroidal space has the potential to solve some long-standing vitreoretinal problems.

WHAT AREAS OF EMERGING RESEARCH MOST EXCITE YOU FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS FIELD?

Definitely the field of visual restoration. There are hundreds of thousands of patients with existing vision loss caused by a wide variety of diseases, but we cannot give them the visual restoration they desire. Over the past decade we have seen the beginning of an era of promising therapies and modalities of treatment that, in some diseases, can prevent further visual deterioration and recover some lost vision. Research in visual recovery for patients who have lost their vision is extremely important, and I'm looking forward to the future potential of the field to fulfill unmet needs for our patients.

IF YOU COULD PRACTICE IN ANY OTHER REGION OF THE WORLD, WOULD YOU, AND WHERE WOULD IT BE?

My career involves traveling all over the world, attending conferences, lecturing, participating in live surgery, and visiting professors. This has given me the opportunity to observe different practices, institutions, cultures, and methodologies. There are pros and cons to every region of the world when it comes to research abilities, health insurance coverage, and practice difficulties, but it is ultimately the lifestyle and culture created within each individual practice, regardless of location, that makes work life enjoyable. That being said, I certainly enjoy Japan. It's so different from the other countries I have visited. ■

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