FELLOWS' FOCUS

MAKING THE MOST OF A RETINA WET LAB

Here are some tips and tricks I learned after a recent wet lab experience.

BY FLAVIUS BECA, MD

For retina fellows, hands-on experience is everything. Wet labs offer an invaluable opportunity to practice surgical techniques in a low-stakes, high-yield environment—with cutting-edge tools, expert faculty, and collaborative learning. Having attended the 11th annual fellows Advanced Vitreous Surgery (fAVS) wet lab hosted at Duke University on May 15, 2025, I walked away from the experience with better technical skills and a better understanding of how to approach wet labs more intentionally. Here are a few takeaways and tips to maximize your time at a wet lab.

NO. 1: PLAN YOUR STATIONS STRATEGICALLY

Before the lab begins, review the agenda and identify the stations most relevant to your current learning curve. Whether it's membrane peeling, chandelier-assisted scleral buckling, or suprachoroidal drug delivery, prioritize the stations where you need the most repetition or have the least real-world exposure (Figure 1). Although the lab is often designed to allow you to reach every station, lines can form and backups happen, so being strategic is important to allow you to get to your desired stations. Create a rough schedule in your mind—if time runs short, you'll have hit your highest value targets.

NO. 2: INTERACT INTENTIONALLY WITH FACULTY AND INDUSTRY

One of the greatest assets of a wet lab is direct access to experienced retina surgeons. Don't hesitate to ask questions, whether technical or personal. Keep it conversational and specific. At some courses, industry representatives can also provide perspective and great insight in the design and application of devices and delivery

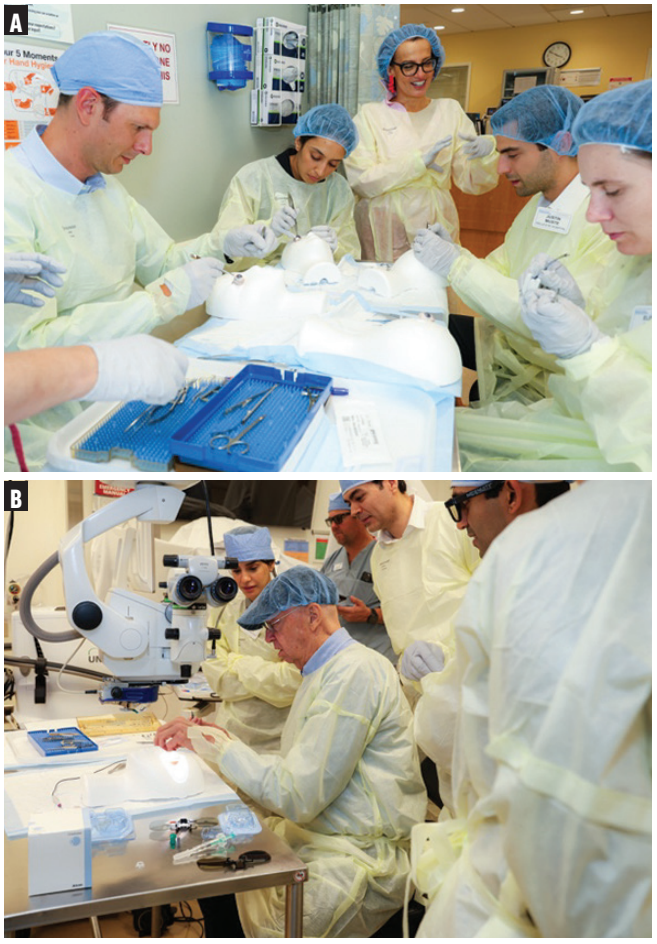

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Figure 1. Wet labs are the ideal opportunity to practice surgical techniques with the help of world-renowned retina surgeons. This wet lab took place at the 15th annual Mass Eye and Ear Vitrectomy Course in Boston.

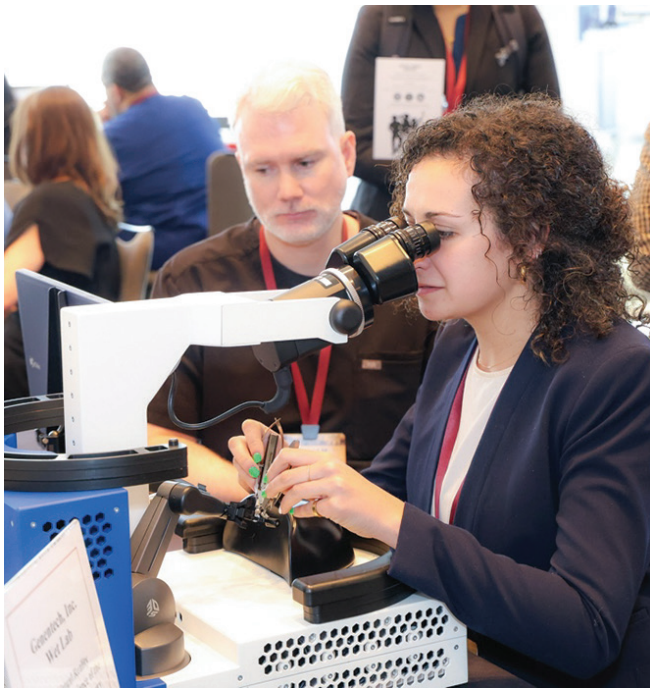

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Figure 2. Industry representatives can be invaluable resources during a wet lab to help trainees as they try new vitrectomy platforms and surgical tools. This wet lab took place during the 13th annual Vit-Buckle Society meeting in Austin.

systems (Figure 2). Industry representatives can sometimes even report on various approaches different surgeons typically use or pearls to master a novel technique. These informal interactions can clarify your technique and expand your surgical perspective far beyond what the hands can feel.

NO. 3: LEARN WHILE YOU WAIT

Downtime at a wet lab is inevitable, whether waiting for a microscope or equipment turnover. Use this time to observe others, ask to scrub in beside a peer, or review recorded procedures, if available. Watching how others approach the same task—especially faculty—can give you a glimpse into alternate techniques or instrument handling you hadn't considered (Figure 3).

NO. 4: PRACTICE WITH PURPOSE

Once you're at a station, don't try to do everything. Focus your efforts. Have one or two specific goals in mind per station. Treat the lab like an OR case—you'll retain more, and the muscle memory will stick.

NO. 5: REFLECT AND REAPPLY

After the lab, jot down a few take-home pearls. At the Duke fAVS wet lab, I learned alternative ways to remove an IOL during a lens exchange and how adjusting the angle of my force vector during a membrane peel could improve the efficiency of my peel. Small adjustments like these can

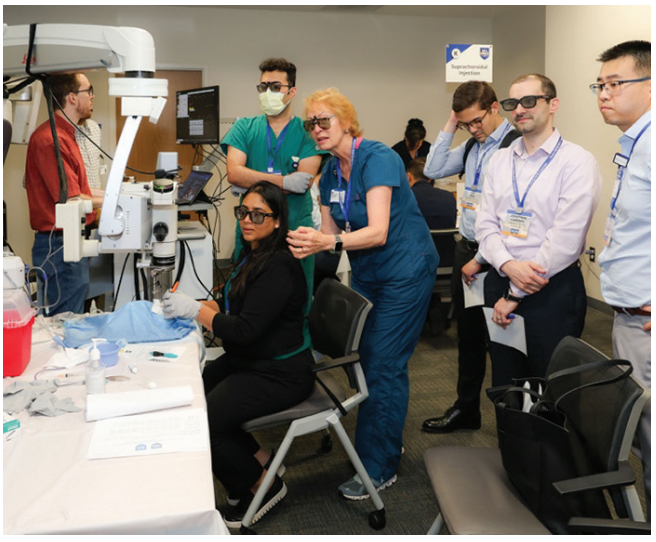

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Figure 3. While waiting for a turn at the stations, wet lab participants can watch and learn from each other. This is the wet lab from the 11th annual fAVS Course in Durham, North Carolina.

WET LABS ARE MORE THAN JUST A REHEARSAL SPACE—THEY ARE ACCELERATORS FOR SURGICAL DEVELOPMENT.

translate directly into improved performance in the OR. Bring these ideas back to your attendings, discuss them during cases, and apply them purposefully.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY

Wet labs are more than just a rehearsal space—they are accelerators for surgical development. Approach them with intention, humility, and curiosity. Faculty are there to teach, and your peers are there to grow alongside you. These sessions also offer valuable opportunities to connect with colleagues and industry leaders from around the country. With the right mindset, even a brief session at the microscope can spark lasting improvements in your surgical intuition. ■

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