

Pravin U. Dugel, MD

Dr. Dugel is Managing Partner of Retinal Consultants of Arizona and Founding Member of the Spectra Eye Institute in Sun City, AZ. He is also a Clinical Associate Professor of Ophthalmology at Doheny Eye Institute, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA.

1. What attracted you to the field of ophthalmology and, more specifically, the subspecialty of retina?

I come from an immigrant refugee family from Nepal that valued education and independence. Although neither of my parents are physicians, they thought that medicine would allow their two sons the opportunity to achieve both. Growing up in Nepal, many of my older relatives were blind, including my grandparents. Given the health care system there, blindness was almost accepted and expected in older people. Because of this, my older brother was determined to become an ophthalmologist. He is a cornea/refractive surgeon in Los Angeles. I simply followed him. I chose the specialty of retina because it is the most surgical field in ophthalmology, and I always considered myself primarily a surgeon.

2. What has been the toughest decision you have had to make as a retina specialist?

The toughest decision of my career thus far was to leave academia and enter private practice. I loved Doheny Eye Institute and admired and respected my mentors there. I still miss academia. However, I am proud of my practice in Phoenix. When I joined Retinal Consultants of Arizona in 1994, there were three physicians and 12 employees serving three locations without any participation in clinical trials. Today, we have eight physicians and more than 120 employees serving more than 20 locations throughout the state, with 12 clinical coordinators and more than 25 active clinical trials. The practice is well positioned for future economic challenges, having invested in peripheral businesses (such as ambulatory surgery centers, research centers, real estate holdings, etc.) that support the core business of medicine. The practice is young, dynamic, busy, and growing rapidly. Most important, I am fortunate to have fantastic partners who are younger, smarter, and more qualified than I.

3. How did training with J. Donald M. Gass, MD, influence your professional path and your approach to practicing retina?

I have been privileged to have mentors who are considered giants in our field. I continue to be privileged to have women and men as my good friends who will be considered giants in our field by the next generation. Dr. Gass taught me far more

than medical retina. He was the finest physician I have ever known, but—and this is the important part—as fine a physician as he was, he was an even better human being.

4. What was your experience living in Nepal?

My childhood in Nepal was a dichotomy. Outside of our house was political turmoil, while inside was great love and peace in an extended family. My father was the first person in Nepal to be awarded a scholarship outside of the country

to the University of Sydney in Australia and my mother was one of the few women to achieve a higher education. My father subsequently led student revolts against the Nepalese monarchy, and my mother started the first English-based school in Nepal, which is still in operation. My parents suffered many political reprisals, but they always stood their ground. Ultimately, we had to leave Nepal when I was 4 years old. I remember landing in Vienna in a snowstorm with nothing on but cloth sneakers and shorts. I mostly remember the airport

in Vienna, where I saw a television and rode on an escalator for the first time in my life. When I was 7 years old, I attended boarding school in England, Dover College and then Harrow-on-the-Hill. This was a difficult time because I was very young and rarely saw my parents more than once a year. I finished high school in New York and attended Columbia University. I became a US citizen while attending medical school at the University of California, Los Angeles. For me, US citizenship represents one of the greatest gifts my parents gave to me, thanks to their years of struggle and sacrifice. I am indeed a very proud refugee and immigrant!

5. What are your interests outside ophthalmology?

Outside of ophthalmology, I have only one interest, my family. My father always told me to be a better father than he was. Impossible as this is, I try to be the best father I can be to my two daughters, Tara (13) and Brenna (10). My wife, Lorraine, is my best friend. We spend as much time with family and friends as possible, and we travel a lot. My family often joins me at meetings. However, my daughters are competitive, nationally ranked squash players, and we travel more and more for their tournaments across the country. Wine tasting and collecting are my secret passions. However, my impatience allows me to do very little of the latter due to the former. ■

