

5 Questions with Stephanie Y. Lu, MD

Stephanie Y. Lu, MD, is an Assistant Clinical Professor in the division of retina and ophthalmology at the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute at the University of California, Irvine, and is Chief of Ophthalmology at Long Beach Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Long Beach, California.



1. In addition to your role as professor, what is the most rewarding part about practicing medicine in the Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system?

Practicing for the VA health care system gives me the opportunity to interact with residents, fellows, and medical students on a daily basis. The patients at VA hospitals are managed mainly by the residents and fellows under the supervision of the attending. It is the best training place for young physicians. By working there, I am able to guide them throughout their training 1 on 1, watch them gain medical knowledge, and advance their surgical skills. Throughout my time there, I have developed close relationships with all of the residents and fellows who rotated in my department. I was able to guide them over the course of their medical education experience. That makes my job extremely rewarding. The VA hospital also gives me the opportunity to conduct clinical research with the collaboration of both university and industry. The hospital has always been very supportive in terms of funding state-of-the-art technologies for my department.

2. What attracted you to the field of ophthalmology?

Before I started medical school I had the opportunity to interact with many ophthalmologists in the community. They all appeared to be happy and love their jobs. I was given the opportunity to shadow an ophthalmologist, a LASIK specialist. My first time seeing a LASIK procedure was a surreal experience. The happiness that the patient conveyed after achieving 20/20 visual acuity influenced my decision to choose ophthalmology as my career.

3. What has been the biggest surprise in your career?

Many people told me that retina is not a good career choice for woman, especially for those who have children,

because the lifestyle is more similar to that of general surgeons than those of other subspecialists in ophthalmology. That statement is completely untrue in my case. I am able to enjoy family time, take vacations, and participate in school parent-teacher association events. I often take my family with me to conferences so we can spend time together while we are away from home. I believe time management is the key to balancing family life with work.

4. What upcoming innovations in retina most excite you?

I believe stem cell therapy will be a breakthrough in the near future. Now that we have ways to stabilize and improve the vision of patients with wet age-related macular degeneration, we need to come up with therapies to repair the previous damage.

5. What do you consider your greatest accomplishment outside of your profession?

Many of us in the medical field are very driven and dedicated to our work, and sometimes we forget to slow down and watch our children grow up. I am proud that I have raised 2 talented daughters who have many interests other than school. They picked up their own interests and wanted to practice on their own without me supervising them. My older daughter was selected as a member of her high school varsity golf team when she was a freshman. She also finished at the highest level for amateur pianists with high honors. My younger daughter is extremely ambitious and competitive. She won several piano competitions at a young age. A couple of years ago, she wanted to learn an instrument other than piano so she could participate in the school orchestra. Now she is the first chair in cello for her school orchestra. I always encourage my daughters to pursue their interests outside of academics. They have learned that success is measured not only by their academic accomplishment, but also by finding their true selves and what they believe in. ■