



Dr. Fahmy has many medals from running races through the years, but his favorite is from a 5k he ran recently with his daughter Jenna.

# Up Close

with AHMAD FAHMY, OD, FAAO, DIPL ABO

## Why did you become an optometrist? Were there any individuals or experiences in your life that influenced your career choice?

This may sound hokey, but I hurt my eye in a soccer match during undergrad. The injury resulted in poor vision, corneal edema, traumatic iritis, and vitreous hemorrhage. Luckily it all resolved spontaneously—and thus began my interest in eyes and how the visual system works. My experience left a strong impression at a time in my life when I was looking for a purposeful career. Although there was no specific individual who influenced my start in optometry, I've had the fortune of being mentored by some amazing eye physicians, including Marlane (Laney) Brown, OD; Donald Korb, OD; Paul Karpecki, OD, FAAO; Richard Lindstrom, MD; David Hardten, MD, FACS; and Eric Donnenfeld, MD; along with many others.

## Why did you choose to specialize in ocular surface disease?

A patient motivated me to focus on ocular surface disease (OSD). She was struggling with severe, paralyzing depression and anxiety and was in chronic ocular discomfort. She also had disabling light sensitivity, and when her depression was at its worst, she had several episodes of suicidal ideation. Having the privilege to be with this patient through the ups and downs of her road to recovery had a profound effect on me and to this day, the experience keeps me motivated and dedicated to developing innovative treatments that help all of our patients with OSD.

## Tell us about your practice's The Vision Project.

The Vision Project is awesome! We provide free surgery to underserved

patients struggling with poor vision due to common conditions such as cataract, glaucoma, and keratoconus. We fully fund our surgeries through private donations and fundraising events throughout the year. I've seen this program transform lives, including the life of a particular pediatric glaucoma patient in need of a tube shunt.

## Thinking back over your career thus far, what is one case that has stuck with you?

During my residency year, I had a 9-year-old patient with *Acanthamoeba* keratitis, a devastating infection. The patient progressed despite having been admitted to the inpatient unit, receiving aggressive topical and oral treatment, and needed a corneal transplant. This case left such an impact on me, mostly because of the serious, life-long implications of managing cases such as this one.

The most striking thing about this case; however, was how well composed, positively spirited, and even-keeled this young patient was on every clinic encounter. I was always waiting for him to break down or get mad. Multiple reflections left me motivated to always improve my clinical skills and approach challenging cases with the level of grace and composure that this 9-year-old demonstrated.

## You are committed to teaching and mentoring younger optometrists. Why is it important to you to be involved with the next generation?

I have been and continue to be mentored by some of the best minds in medicine. I strongly believe that the ophthalmic community should work together collaboratively, and

in doing so, we are more likely to improve patient outcomes. I enjoy sharing my clinical experience and contributing to my profession in a meaningful way through high-level educational symposia. The responsibility of teaching also pushes me to continue to make sure I'm studying and devoting adequate time to ponder how we can solve medical challenges.

As my friend and respected colleague John Berdahl, MD, says, "Life is short. Let's commit to doing something big with our time."

## You have a wife and four daughters. What's your favorite thing to do as a family and how do you make time every day for them?

My wife, Mona, and my four little princesses keep me grounded. It's important to focus on being in the moment, undistracted, and to avoid being in continuous passive attention mode when it's family time. I work only after I've completed my family responsibilities each day. The best clinic day is no match for being there to watch one of my girls score a hat trick on the soccer pitch, run a race, or land the perfect back bend kickover in gymnastics. Our favorite activity these days is hanging out with our new labradoodle puppy, Buddy. ■

## AHMAD FAHMY, OD, FAAO, DIPL ABO

- Optometrist and Immediate Past Director of Clinical Operations, Minnesota Eye Consultants, Bloomington and Minnetonka, Minnesota
- Co-Founder, Eyes On Dry Eye Virtual Symposium; Founder, Twin Cities OSD Symposium
- Member, *Modern Optometry* Editorial Advisory Board
- amfahmy1@gmail.com
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