



ONE TO WATCH

NAVPREET HEHAR, OD, FAAO

Please share with us your background.

I hail from Toronto, Canada, but the majority of my formative years unfolded in Canton, Michigan. Growing up as a twin brought numerous advantages, including the shared experience of pursuing our undergraduate studies at Wayne State University. However, our paths diverged when I opted to delve into eye care and attended the Michigan College of Optometry. Afterward, I embarked on an ocular disease residency at the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veteran Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Cleveland, Ohio.

Describe your current position.

I am an assistant professor and have been part of The Eye Institute at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) since 2017. Operating within an academic environment allows me to contribute to the education of future optometrists and mentor motivated residents. Although our clinic boasts various specialties, my focus is on comprehensive exams, ocular disease, and emergency cases.

Who are your mentors?

My professional path has been profoundly influenced by the guidance and support of several individuals who helped lead me to where I am today. Among them are the attendings I had the privilege to work alongside at the Cleveland VAMC: Scott Anthony, OD; Rachael Canania, OD; Eric Eleff, MD; Gurpinderjeet Kaur, OD; and, last, but not least, my residency mentor David

Ronccone, OD. Their guidance and mentorship have significantly influenced my clinical judgment and contributed to my professional development.

What has been the most memorable experience of your career thus far?

My mission trip to Panama. I worked alongside my PCO students to provide eye care services to underserved communities lacking essential health services. This trip left a lasting impression on me, and I am grateful to have found a sense of career fulfillment through the experience. Since then, I have volunteered to help underserved communities in the Philadelphia area.

What are some new technological advances that you find particularly exciting? Which advances in the pipeline are you most enthusiastic or curious about?

Developments that particularly excite me are sustained-release technologies for patients with glaucoma and contact lens drug delivery for treating various ocular conditions. I'm also enthusiastic about advancements in OCT software and portable devices, such as the Notal Home OCT (Notal Vision). Lastly, I am intrigued by the integration of AI into our field, and I'm eager to see how it will evolve optometric practice.

Describe a typical day in your life.

Working in an academic institution offers a distinct experience compared with a private practice setting. My

typical clinic day starts at 8 am and ends at 5 pm, but sometimes goes until 8 pm. I'm involved in mentoring second-year students and supporting residents in the emergency clinic. In addition to patient care responsibilities, I collaborate with my mentor, De Gaulle I. Chigbu, OD, MS, FBCLA, FCOptom, FAAO, Dipl, on writing articles for academic journals, which serves as a continuous learning opportunity. Once my workday is complete, I find relaxation by spending time with family and friends, and binge-watching dramas, if time permits.

What advice can you offer to individuals who are just now choosing their career paths after finishing optometry school or a residency?

Explore different career avenues within the field, whether it's private practice, academia, research, or specialized areas, such as pediatric optometry or vision rehabilitation. Networking and seeking mentorship from seasoned professionals can offer valuable insights and guidance. Ultimately, choose a path that resonates with your interests and values, and aligns with the lifestyle you envision. Always embrace opportunities for continued learning and professional development to stay current in our evolving field. ■

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- Financial disclosure: None