



ONE TO WATCH

KALEB ABBOTT, OD, MS, FAAO

Please share with us your background.

I grew up in Kingwood, a small suburb outside of Houston, Texas. I obtained a Bachelors of Science in nutrition at Texas A&M University. Afterward, I attended the University of Houston College of Optometry, where I delved into research, ultimately earning a Master's degree in physiological optics and vision science.

Describe your current position.

I am an assistant professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, seeing patients in our dry eye clinic and the Center for Ocular Inflammation. We serve as a tertiary referral for Colorado and neighboring states. My patient demographic primarily comprises individuals with advanced ocular surface disease (OSD), including ocular cicatricial pemphigoid, graft-versus-host disease, thyroid eye disease, and Sjögren syndrome.

I also serve as the principal investigator on several clinical trials related to dry eye and am preparing to launch investigator-initiated trials on neuropathic ocular pain.

Who are your mentors?

My earliest mentor in life was my father, who instilled in me a passion for research. I also had the privilege of being advised by Lisa Ostrin, OD, PhD. Ashley Wallace-Tucker, OD, is another steadfast mentor, offering invaluable guidance on career trajectories.

Until his departure from the

University of Colorado in 2022, Scott Hauswirth, OD, mentored me in OSD and neurosensory dysfunction. I am also fortunate to be mentored by Amit Reddy, MD, a uveitis specialist, and Darren Gregory, MD, a cornea specialist, both of whom provide invaluable insights and support.

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

For better or worse, my most rewarding clinical moments come from treating neuropathic pain. It is immensely gratifying to improve the quality of life of someone affected by debilitating eye pain. However, for every patient whose condition improves, there are many others who continue to experience symptoms. My aspiration is to contribute to the discovery of an effective solution for this difficult condition.

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

Although OSD is still a niche of mine, my clinical interests have become focused on treating nerve disorders and pain perception. I envision a future with targeted treatments aimed at specific corneal nociceptors through precise ion channel modulation, pharmaceuticals to address peripheral neuropathies, and expanded therapeutic avenues for managing altered pain perception, or nociplastic pain.

Describe a typical day in your life.

I wake up at 5:00 am to begin working on research or presentations prior to seeing patients in the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus dry eye clinic. Each week, 3 half-days are dedicated to new comprehensive dry eye workups, 1 half-day to procedures (eg, intense pulsed light therapy and meibomian gland probing), 2 half-days to research and clinical trials, and the remaining time to dry eye follow-ups. When I'm not working, I spend as much time as I can with my daughter and wife. Come September, my family will grow from three people to five, as we are expecting twins!

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

Discovering your true passion in eye care may require thousands of patient encounters over several years to understand your skillset and preferences. Trust the journey, learn from every experience, and allow yourself the time to find your true calling in optometry. ■

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- Financial disclosure: Advisor (SunSnap Kids); Speaker (Scope)