



Dr. Koetting mixes yoga with skiing in Tahoe City, Calif.

Up Close

with **CECELIA KOETTING, OD, FAAO, DIPL ABO**

How did you first become interested in optometry?

Randomly enough, I am a third-generation optometrist, but I originally wanted to be a pediatric oncologist. However, in college, I realized after volunteering in a hospital's pediatric oncology ward that it was not for me, so after graduation, I worked for a startup biotech company helping to develop their quality control microbiology department, which wasn't a good fit for me either. So, I looked at my own family and realized optometry was where I wanted to be.

You accepted a position at Hines Sight in Denver, Colorado, last November. How are you adjusting to the new practice and location?

It's been very different, but in a good way. I have been challenged to help build up a dry eye clinic, garner referrals, and create schedule templates, as well as organize staff and manage meetings. When it comes to patient care, I've re-learned the art of fitting contact lenses, while continuing to provide a high level of ocular disease treatment. Overall, it has been an opportune change that is helping me to grow as a practitioner.

You are active in your educational efforts in eye care, serving on editorial boards, appearing in videos and podcasts, lecturing, etc. Why is it important to you to go beyond simply practicing eye care?

Being constantly involved in multiple things outside of patient care pushes me to continue to educate myself so that I can be a resource to my colleagues. More importantly, it pushes me to stay at the forefront of innovation to better care for my patients. And, of course, I can't lie—it's just fun!

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

I have had many memorable moments over the past 10 years, but the one that stands out occurred last year. I was asked to accept the induction of my grandfather, Robert A. Koetting, OD, into the National Optometric Hall of Fame at the American Optometric Association annual meeting. Being able to stand up and recognize all that he did for our profession was inspiring. He passed away while I was in optometry school and was not able to offer any advice to me directly. However, over the years, I have had countless fellow optometrists whom he inspired and counseled share advice with me that they received from him. I can only hope that I am able to support our profession and our patients as well as he did.

Has your personal journey as a cancer survivor helped you to be a better care provider?

There are so many lessons that I have been able to take away from my cancer journey, many of which I feel have made me a better human and doctor. I am able to discuss with patients what to expect from chemotherapy and radiation treatments on a personal level, giving tidbits of advice that helped me. I have slowed my pace in clinic to make sure I ask about systemic diagnoses and treatments in more detail. I also ask about family history and how patients are doing overall. Lastly, as a patient, I refuse to fixate on the numbers: stage 4 colorectal cancer with a 5-year survival rate of less than 30%. So, as a doctor, I try to continue the same mentality, especially with my neuro-optometry patients. They are not just numbers or risk rates, they are people whose attitudes and commitments can tip that scale.

What is the best piece of career advice you've ever received?

Work to live, don't live to work. You have to maintain a good balance, otherwise everything suffers. Some days I'm better at this than others, but even when I'm working and lecturing, I only do these things because I truly enjoy them.

What's behind the Instagram handle dr_jazz_hands?

If you have spent any time around me, you know that I am a very odd duck. I'm random and silly and unapologetic about it because it's who I am, and it makes me happy. One of these quirks is that I will randomly do jazz hands. While I was in residency, a friend of mine called me "Dr. Jazz Hands," and the nickname stuck.

Not long ago, you earned your certification as a yoga teacher. How did you handle that while practicing full time and managing everything else in life?

I have been practicing yoga for more than 15 years and have always wanted to take the next step to further my practice. Time and money have always been obstacles, but during COVID, when everything slowed down and I was going through cancer treatments, I felt it was something that needed to happen. I have found that the intense discussions, pushing of my physical and mental boundaries, and self-introspections were all needed and couldn't have been more perfectly timed. ■

CECELIA KOETTING, OD, FAAO, DIPL ABO

- Hines Sight, Denver, Colorado
- Member, *Modern Optometry* Editorial Advisory Board
- Dr.CeceliaKoetting@gmail.com;
- Instagram @dr_jazz_hands, @BeautifulHealthyEyes
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