



Dr. Davidson picking out a tree with his son, Brooks, for Christmas 2020.

Up Close

with JOSHUA DAVIDSON, OD, FAAO, FSLs

Tell us about your journey toward becoming an optometrist. Why did you choose the profession?

My journey began in seventh grade, when I had my first eye exam with Michael J. Brewer, OD, in Bay City, Michigan. Until then, I had dreamed of being a fighter pilot and assumed I had perfect eyes—turns out I had quite the opposite. At that appointment I knew that eye care, specifically optometry, was the career for me. I went directly into soft contact lenses and skipped the spectacle correction that most kids start with. One of my most vivid memories is being on the baseball diamond for the first time after getting my contacts. I had always excelled at baseball, but with my contact lenses I was astonished at how much easier the game got.

You're the only fellow of the Scleral Lens Education Society in your area and one of the highest volume specialty lens and scleral lens fitters in the Gulf South region. How did that happen?

My two passions are dry eyes and specialty contact lenses, namely scleral lenses. Some time ago, I realized that the volume of scleral lenses I was fitting was extremely high. I decided to push my knowledge and learn as much as I could about scleral lenses. I learned about the Scleral Lens Education Society and its fellowship process, and I thought that the process of gaining fellowship would help me feel more confident in my scleral lens fitting skills. I attribute a lot of my professional and business growth to the Society.

What sparked your interest in specialty lenses?

Josh Lotoczky, OD, at the Michigan College of Optometry, inspired my interest in specialty contact lenses. In

my third-year clinic, we saw a patient with a history of radial keratotomy with numerous enhancements. She hadn't been legally able to drive in years, but when a scleral lens was placed on her eye she achieved near perfect visual acuity. Her excitement about her vision convinced me that this was something that I wanted to do each day. When I later moved to Louisiana, there were few ODs who seemed to have a passion for the specialty. It was a perfect situation in which to grow my specialty lens clinic.

You've started a new venture. What can you tell us about it?

I run the largest dry eye center in the Gulf South region, so I see a large number and a wide variety of patients with dry eyes. One thing that is apparent is that the typical dry eye patient (really, almost any individual) does not drink nearly enough water to achieve optimal systemic hydration. I spent years recommending that patients drink eight to 10 glasses of water a day, only to be widely ignored. This prompted me to recommend powdered hydration products that made hydration simpler.

However, I was surprised to learn the high amounts of sugar in these types of drinks. Not only is too much sugar generally unhealthy, but sugar is proinflammatory. Knowing there had to be a better way, I collaborated with Matthew Smith, MD, and some chemistry PhDs to create our own sugar-free hyper-hydration product, Dry Eye Drink (dryeyedrink.com). This powdered substance is full of electrolytes, vitamins A, B3, B6, B12, and C, and antiinflammatory agents including green tea extract, turmeric, omega-3 fatty acids derived from algae, and taurine. The response has been much better than expected, and we hear each day from patients

around the world how it's made an impact on their lives. Be on the lookout for Dry Eye Drink PM in the near future.

What's the best piece of advice you've received?

"If you're not growing, you're dying." It's one of the foundations that I live my life by. As optometrists and human beings, if we're not continually improving ourselves, our skills, and our lives, then we're really missing out. Just as professional athletes need to continue to train, so do we, in all aspects of life.

What's your favorite thing about being a dad? Will you encourage your son to follow in your footsteps?

I love everything about it. My son Brooks is my world in every way. However, if forced to choose one thing, I would say without a doubt it's watching him pick up on new things and watching those little gears in his brain try to process new information. And no matter how many times I hear him say the word "Dad," I can't imagine a time when it wouldn't melt my heart.

I would love nothing more than to watch Brooks enter the eye care field. However, just as my parents never encouraged me to enter any field, but rather let me find my passion on my own, I'll do the same for him. So long as he loves going to work each and every day just as I do, I'll be a happy dad. ■

JOSHUA DAVIDSON, OD, FAAO, FSLs

- Optometrist, Williamson Eye Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- Member, *Modern Optometry* Editorial Advisory Board
- jdavidson@weceye.com; Instagram @dryeyeod
- Financial disclosures: Speaker (Eyevance Pharmaceuticals, Glaukos, Kala Pharmaceuticals); Advisory Board Member (Eyevance Pharmaceuticals, Kala Pharmaceuticals)