



We asked a panel of thought leaders to nominate optometrists whom they consider to be “Rising Stars.” We tallied the votes and will feature these up-and-comers in every issue.

MEET THIS ISSUE’S RISING STAR:

MARK SCHAEFFER, OD



Please share with us your background.

I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. I earned my undergraduate degree in Marketing from the University of Georgia and then graduated from the Southern College of Optometry. After completing a residency in

Ocular Disease at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami, Florida, I moved back to Birmingham, where I currently work in an 18-office, 23-doctor primary care and ocular disease practice with my family.

I am a member of both the Alabama and American Optometric Association, American Academy of Optometry (Sports Vision Section), and Ocular Surface Society of Optometry, as well as a founding member of the Intrepid Eye Society.

What drew you to optometry and, specifically, to your field of interest?

I am a second-generation optometrist and have two siblings who are also optometrists. However, none of us considered optometry as a profession while we were in school. After graduating college, I had no idea what I wanted to do, so I went to work at Schaeffer Eye Center as a technician, heading up a couple of contact lens studies. While there, I fell in love with patient care and decided to apply to optometry school. My residency at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute was one of the most amazing experiences I have ever had. The overall professionalism of the clinic and the exposure I gained to complex and interesting cases from around the globe further fueled my passion for optometry. I focused on primary care optometry because I enjoyed the opportunity to be responsible for more than just the visual needs of patients, and I found that it provides an effective approach to caring for people with multiple health care needs.

Please describe your current position.

I provide primary eye care to patients from ages 4 to 94, including comprehensive eye examinations, vision correction, and treatment and management of ocular disease and various medical conditions. In our practice, we see a lot of everything and are on the frontline of diagnosing and helping patients understand what is going on with their eyes, and how it affects them. We collaborate with a number of doctors so if there is care or therapy required that extends beyond our scope of practice, we send patients to the appropriate specialist, and then they come back to us for follow-up and continued care.

In addition to the practice, I also lecture on ocular disease and refractive technology across the country.

Who are/were your mentors?

My dad, Jack L. Schaeffer, OD, FAAO, is clearly one of my mentors. He never pressured any of his kids to go into optometry or to join the family business, but he inspired us to become optometrists simply by the example he set through his passion for and commitment to optometry, his patients, and his community. He has been helpful in providing guidance to me and, outside of myself, has been my toughest critic when it comes to patient care, which has helped me become a better doctor. I was also fortunate to be trained by Mark T. Dunbar, OD, FAAO, during my residency at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, and I am indebted to both Kirk L. Smick, OD, FAAO, and Charles Ficco, OD, for providing me with perspective outside of my family about what it is to practice primary care optometry in an OD/MD practice setting.

Editorially independent content supported by





MARK SCHAEFFER, OD

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

I am really excited by all the developments that have come into the dry eye space over the last 5 years, as well as the consumer and professional media coverage that is generating greater awareness about the condition and the availability of diagnostic tools and treatments.

New and innovative prescription treatments such as Xiidra (Shire) and medical devices such as TrueTear (Allergan), LipiFlow (TearScience), and MiBo Thermaflo (Mibo Medical Group) have reinvigorated the category, providing us with a variety of ways to treat the ocular surface and provide relief to our dry eye patients.

Additionally, I believe that the recent publication of the Tear Film & Ocular Surface Society's Dry Eye Workshop II (DEWS II) report will help us, as clinicians, better recognize and diagnose dry eye disease, identify approaches to treatment, and understand and address the psychological effects it can have on our patients' lives.

What is one of your most challenging doctor/patient conversations?

I dread when a contact lens patient comes in and tells me he or she is "fine" because in his or her mind that fine often means, "I do not want to tell you what is bothering me because you will tell me something bad and take away my contact lenses."

In our practice, we try to be as patient-centered as possible. I try to reinforce to patients that I need as full a picture as possible of their health, vision, and any recent changes or problems, so that I can diagnose their issues efficiently and precisely, and we can work together to identify and take the proper steps to ensure their eye health and vision quality. I have found that when I take the time to dig deeper and listen to patients' complaints, I am able to get the information I need to diagnose the issue and make more efficient use of chair time. By taking the time to educate patients on their diagnosis and treatment, I have found that

they are more likely to be receptive of my recommendations and compliant in following them.

What advice can you offer to individuals who are just now choosing their career paths after finishing OD school?

Now is a great time to be an optometrist. Market statistics and demographics suggest that the number of ophthalmologists is not increasing substantially, but the number of people who need eye care services continues to grow. Optometrists have an opportunity to be primary eye care providers, but we need to continue to learn new things to better ourselves and enhance the patient care we provide. I advise new grads to consider a residency, go to meetings, and learn new skills that will help you in the future. All of these things will pay dividends down the road and will help our patients and our profession.

Tell us about an innovative procedure you are performing or a new imaging/diagnostic tool that has improved your practice.

We know that our patients look to us to take care of their eye care needs, and we must do everything we can to continue to earn their trust and confidence. We try to stay on top of new technologies, treatment strategies, and opportunities to expand the services our practice provides. To help many of our patients struggling with dry eye—meibomian gland dysfunction, in particular—we have had great results with LipiFlow. Patients have commented that during treatment they do not feel like they are at an eye doctor's office; rather it is like being at a spa. ■

Mark Schaeffer, OD

- Schaeffer Eye Center, Birmingham, Alabama
- drmschaeffer@schaeffereyecenter.com
- financial disclosure: Allergan, Bausch + Lomb, BioTissue, and Shire