Dear Prospective Resident,

Where will I become the best ophthalmologist I can possibly be?

This is a fundamental question medical school graduates must consider when applying to a residency program.

The UCLA Department of Ophthalmology has been training future leaders for over 50 years, exposing residents to the full breadth of clinical, surgical, and research training taught by world-renowned leaders in their fields.

A key component of our Program is the opportunity for residents to interact with vastly different patient populations with a broad assortment of eye problems. Clinical rotations at training hospitals across Southern California expose young physicians to a full range of ophthalmic issues—from complex eye disease to emergency trauma.

Residents gain vast amounts of hands-on experience in both the clinic and operating room as they manage heavy patient loads and meet a high surgical demand. Each day exposes the resident to something new that sharpens their clinical acumen and prepares them for any ocular challenge they might come across in their future.

Upon their graduation, UCLA residents are experienced clinicians and surgeons fully prepared to launch their career forward. They join an alumni class who—along with their faculty mentors—are making tremendous strides in furthering our profession and in advancing eye health.

Sincerely,

Bartly J. Mondino, MD
Bradley R. Straatsma, MD, Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology
Director, Stein Eye Institute
Chairman, UCLA Department of Ophthalmology
Affiliation Chairman, Doheny Eye Institute

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Dear Prospective Resident,

Thank you for taking the time to visit our Residency Program. Our strength lies in the breadth, depth, and quality of the training experience offered by the UCLA Department of Ophthalmology.

Faculty mentors are award-winning scholars, passionate about the transformative care they provide. Under their tutelage, residents gain hands-on exposure to a myriad of eye diseases and conditions through rotations at UCLA-affiliated hospitals, and grow as compassionate and capable ophthalmologists.

Along with clinical rotations, surgical training, didactic education, and research, residents are immersed in ophthalmology training across every subspecialty—steadily increasing knowledge and independence. Addressing health care disparities is a Department focal point, and residents who are committed to advancing global eye health can provide clinical and surgical care in resource-limited areas both here at home and abroad.

After three years of rigorous study, residents graduate with advanced tools, refined skills, and enlightened ideas about the benefits of collaborative medicine. They also have a new family of colleagues who will be lifetime friends.

From there, residents travel many paths: into private practice, fellowship training in an ophthalmic subspecialty, a bench-to-bedside academic career honed from our MD/PhD EyeSTAR program, or as a leader in ophthalmology with added business expertise attained through our EyeMBA program.

Thank you for considering the Residency Program at the UCLA Department of Ophthalmology and for your dedication to the preservation of sight and prevention of blindness.

Sincerely,

Stacy L. Pineles, MD
Jerome and Joan Snyder Chair in Ophthalmology
Residency Program Director
UCLA Department of Ophthalmology
Residents Gain Unique Training Opportunities at UCLA-Affiliated Hospitals

When Benjamin Campbell, MD, a medical student graduating from Baylor College of Medicine in 2015, was exploring the nation’s schools to find the best choice for his residency in ophthalmology, UCLA popped to the top of his list because of the training provided by pre-eminent ophthalmologists, extensive patient contact, and advanced surgical opportunities.

But for Dr. Campbell, now a third-year resident, the UCLA Department of Ophthalmology offered a standout opportunity unlike any other residency program.

As a key element of UCLA’s three-year program to train doctors to become comprehensive ophthalmologists, every resident participates in clinical rotations at the Stein Eye Institute vision-science campus in Westwood, the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, and UCLA-affiliated teaching hospitals: Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in Torrance, Olive View-UCLA Medical Center in Sylmar, and the Veterans Affairs Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System hospitals in West Los Angeles and North Hills.

Each teaching hospital in the rotation serves diverse communities of Southern California and provides patient care for vastly different populations with a broad range of ocular issues.

“We believe our residency delivers the widest range of experiences of any program in the country,” says Stacy L. Pineles, MD, Jerome and Joan Snyder Chair in Ophthalmology and residency program director for the UCLA Department of Ophthalmology.

“The opportunities for training, patient contact, and community service offered by rotations at UCLA-affiliated hospitals are unique among residency programs, and are important for medical students who are training to become practicing ophthalmologists ready to treat any ocular issue or patient situation that comes in the door.”

Comprehensive resident training: critical in Southern California

Instruction at such a diverse range of hospitals adds a specialized facet for UCLA residents, who represent some of America’s premier young ophthalmologists-in-training.

“Our residents are the best of the best,” says Bartly J. Mondino, MD, chair of the UCLA Department of Ophthalmology and director of the Stein Eye Institute. “Every year, 400 graduating medical students apply for our program; we interview 60, and we take only eight. So at any given time in our three-year program, we are training 24 doctors in a broad range of environments that the teaching hospitals provide.”
And the specialized nature of the program is vital in Southern California, with fewer programs for training than in other major metropolitan areas.

“In the New York City area, for example, there are more than ten ophthalmology residency programs—in Los Angeles, there are two,” says Pradeep S. Prasad, MD, MBA, chief of the Division of Ophthalmology at Harbor-UCLA. “Our residents are direct beneficiaries of the opportunity to provide vital eye care services to the vast population of patients in our region.”

UCLA ophthalmology residents see the advantages of working with the teaching hospitals from the perspective of how those opportunities broaden the scope of their hands-on experience—and their individual responsibilities.

“Working at the teaching hospitals is an ideal training ground—the best of every world,” says Victoria Tseng, MD, PhD, a third-year resident. “When I applied for training in ophthalmology,” says Dr. Tseng, “what really stood out about UCLA’s program was the diversity of training, the number of patients in my care, and the independence I would receive as I progressed.

“At the teaching hospitals, we are working with low-income patients who not only have medical challenges, but who often have had only limited access to medical care—especially for their eyes,” says Dr. Tseng. “We see the spectrum of eye disease—often with opportunities for tremendous improvement. I routinely have patients who are near-blind one day and after treatment have 20/20 vision—that is a tremendously rewarding outcome for a resident in training.”

Equally important in training new ophthalmologists at the teaching hospitals is the emphasis on self-reliance.

“Some residency programs feature hand-holding approaches—the UCLA Department of Ophthalmology mandate is independence,” says Wayne Gui, MD, who completed his residency in the Department and is now a vitreoretinal surgery fellow at UCLA. “Learning how to be a self-sufficient ophthalmologist is especially important at the teaching hospitals, where we are expected to make individual decisions and recommendations when we consult with the attending physicians.”

Venues with specialized challenges

Each of the affiliated hospitals presents its own set of challenges for residents and their training. At Olive View, for example, the low-income patient load is especially heavy, with more than 25,000 patient visits each year.

“This is a ‘learn by doing’ environment,” says Uday Devgan, MD, FACS, FRCS, chief of ophthalmology at Olive View. “Here we get to train our residents in care for a population that is truly in need,” says Dr. Devgan, “treating diseases as they hone their skills along the way.”

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STACY L. PINELLES, MD
Director, Residency Program
UCLA Department of Ophthalmology

“To be certified for independent surgery in some specialties requires completing a total of 20 of the procedures. Our residents routinely do that many procedures in one day.”

UDAY DEVGAN, MD, FACS, FRCS
Chief of Ophthalmology
Olive View-UCLA Medical Center
Resident training at UCLA is a three-year program that transforms medical doctors into comprehensive ophthalmologists. “Besides the tremendous talents of our residents, the strength of our residency comes from the breadth and depth of our training,” says Dr. Stacy Pineles, residency program director for the UCLA Department of Ophthalmology. What do residents learn during their three years? More than 50 years of refinement have created a system of training built on a philosophy of step-by-step increases in the residents’ responsibility: initial exposure to ophthalmology under total supervision in the first year; in the second year, residents increase their knowledge of ophthalmic practice and become more independent; and in the third year, residents assume full responsibility for treating patients in preparation for receiving national accreditation as ophthalmologists.

The residents’ work includes studies in the general field of vision science and the range of ophthalmic subspecialties, and clinical rotations at a variety of hospitals (see main article)—all in addition to ongoing classroom instruction, surgical training, and involvement in original research projects. “Our work is on-the-job training,” says Dr. Benjamin Campsyl, a third-year resident. “We always treat patients under the supervision of attending physicians, but it is our job to staff the clinic, present the cases to faculty or senior residents, and determine the course of treatment.”

As at the other teaching hospitals, the surgical schedule at Olive View is particularly brisk, with Dr. Devgan and attending physicians guiding residents in 5–10 surgeries and 40–50 related procedures each day. As a result of the heavy patient load and eye problems that are endemic in low-income populations that result from diabetes and high blood pressure—such as retina issues—UCLA residents receive far more opportunities for performing surgery than their counterparts in other resident training programs. “To be certified for independent surgery in some specialties requires completing a total of 20 of the procedures,” says Dr. Devgan. “Our residents routinely do that many procedures in one day.”

Center point for trauma care
In Torrance, UCLA residents training at Harbor-UCLA experience many of the same patient populations and challenges as their colleagues at Olive View. Harbor-UCLA, however, includes the added dimension of being a Level I trauma center and receives a high volume of emergency cases—many of which involve traumatic injury to the eye. “We see many trauma patients who have both vision-threatening and life-threatening injuries,” says Dr. Prasad. “The high volume of ocular trauma that we see presents crucial opportunities for resident training.”

“UCLA residents perform all of our surgical procedures with the guidance of faculty members,” Dr. Prasad says. “The depth of experience the residents acquire trains them to manage cases from beginning to end. When they have completed their time here, our residents have received such a rich exposure to the field that they can handle virtually any type of ophthalmic problem.”

Support for those who have served
UCLA residents working at the Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals in West Los Angeles and North Hills see a different spectrum of patients: military veterans, primarily men—although with a growing number of women—often older, with age-related eye diseases and conditions, such as macular degeneration, cataract, and diabetic eye disease. UCLA residents also treat the vision concerns of veterans who are experiencing homelessness.

“For our residents, serving a rotation at the VA gives them an opportunity to work with patients who often have medical conditions much different from those at the county hospitals.”

JOANNA A. GIACONI, MD
Chief of the Ophthalmology Section
Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System

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JOANNA A. GIACONI, MD
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county hospitals,” says JoAnn A. Giaconi, MD, chief of the ophthalmology section at the Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System. “Our residents also see some of the same conditions that are common at Olive View and Harbor,” says Dr. Giaconi, “such as the effects of diabetes and high blood pressure—but with the added perspective of better control that results from managed treatment the VA has been providing.”

A team approach
For Dr. Campbell, the training he received at UCLA’s affiliated hospitals has provided the additional depth in his resident experience that he was seeking three years ago—along with an appreciation for the high level of cooperation and support that comes in a pressurized teaching hospital environment. “At the teaching hospitals, the residents work with a team approach,” says Dr. Campbell. “We all see the same patients, and the more experienced residents provide guidance for the newer ones. Everyone works as a team and stays until the last patient is seen. We support and learn from each other as we care for our patients. We are all in this together.”

“When they have completed their time here, our residents have received such a rich exposure to the field that they can handle virtually any type of ophthalmic problem.”

PRADEEP S. PRASAD, MD, MBA
Chief of the Division of Ophthalmology Harbor-UCLA Medical Center
UCLA Health is consistently ranked among the best hospitals in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*, and UCLA Stein Eye and Doheny Eye Institutes are ranked among the top five in the nation in ophthalmology.