

EXPLORING PRIVATE-PRACTICE FELLOWSHIPS



A YoungMD Connect Workshop presented on June 23, 2022

The decision to pursue a fellowship is an important one in the young ophthalmologist's career, but it is also entirely personal. It all starts with choosing a program that fits your specific goals. In this workshop, panelists from different professional tracks will offer their perspectives on the growing number of private-sector fellowships, describe what these programs look like from the inside, and offer insights on how you can find the right fit for your career path.



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Y. Ralph Chu, MD, Chu Vision Institute, Bloomington, Minnesota

"We can iterate things in private practice at a faster pace than in academic practice."

What are the major differences from Dr. Chu's perspective?

- Private practice offers the real world of the business which is not taught in academia.
- You get exposed to new surgical skills and techniques—technologies and advancements which are not typically available in academic settings.
- In private practice there is a faster pace and higher volume of patients. You have to earn your surgery, cases are not just handed to you.
- There is more accessibility to industry driven clinical research trials which exposes you to future technology years before it becomes available to the public.
- The key to success: Be humble. Be flexible. Be open-minded.



A DAY IN THE LIFE

Caroline Watson, MD, The Eye Institute of West Florida, Largo, FL

"I was interested in a fellowship at The Eye Institute of West Florida due to the advanced technology and the opportunity to perform a high volume of anterior segment surgeries. My fellowship directors and I like to be on the cutting edge of innovation, and I had several opportunities to contribute to R&D with our industry partners."

What does a "Day in the Life" look like in Dr. Watson's fellowship experience?

- Most private practice fellowships offer high surgical volume; I was given the opportunity to perform over 1,300 cataract, cornea, and refractive surgeries during my time at The Eye Institute.
- I operated 3-5 days a week and saw patients in clinic while I was not in the OR. Patient selection and clinic efficiency were key components of my day. I learned how to get the high-yield information out of each patient in order to recommend the best surgical options for their specific needs. This took several months to master.
- During my fellowship, I was involved in several FDA trials that our practice participated in.
- The mentorship has been extremely rewarding surgically and clinically, but also from a business standpoint. I had guidance and oversight during my job search and during my contract negotiations.
- Both of my fellowship directors took a personalized hands-on approach to my learning, and their teaching styles complemented one another. When I completed my fellowship, I was confident in my skillset and felt prepared for the next step in my career.



PRIVATE-PRACTICE FELLOWSHIPS: OPPORTUNITIES IN RETINA

Arshad Khanani, MD, Sierra Eye Associates, Reno, Nevada

"It's not just the number of surgeries [you'll do in a private-practice fellowship], but the kind of cases: how you manage patient care and the postop care; how to navigate complications; and how to talk to referring doctors."

What are the major differences from Dr. Khanani's perspective?

- There's a lot more involvement in research and clinical trials in private versus academic practice.
 - In general, you have a much closer working relationship with industry than in academia: If you can learn to collaborate early on, by writing IRBs or helping in trials, it can help build your career over time.
- There is more one-on-one mentoring and interaction in a private-practice setting.
- You do get exposure to surgery.
 - However, don't focus on the number of cases. Figure out if you will be involved in the types of cases you are interested in.
- What does it take to be successful?
 - Humility: You will have to take honest feedback from your mentors. "In general, retina will keep you humble every day."
 - Hard work: There is a lot more responsibility because of the smaller setting.



SETTING A TRAJECTORY FOR YOUR CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

J David Stephens, MD, Tyson Eye, Cape Coral, Florida

"When I started fellowship, I was told it would be the year I turned from a college athlete to pro. It's the most important year of your training and builds on the foundation set during residency. Many of the things I learned about the day-to-day decisions came from fellowship."

What are the major differences from Dr. Stephens' perspective?

- The best thing you can do for yourself is to build your surgical acumen and skills in the clinic: become the expert in the room.
 - Always maintain excellent quality with high volume and efficiency.
- This is an important time to define your values (clinical, business, and personal) for your own career.
 - Learn what you really want, not what you think you should want your career and lifestyle to look like; it's a personal journey.
 - For Dr. Stephens, it was exposure to the business side of practice—practice development & management—that really made the experience valuable.
- The fellowship itself is a potential stepping stone. You will meet people during training who could be important connectors as you navigate your career path, and they will certainly become lifelong colleagues.