

Elena Albé, MD

Dr. Albé discusses how her passion for visual arts sparked her interest in ophthalmology and how she guarantees each of her patients receives the best treatment possible.



Why did you choose to enter the field of ophthalmology?

First, I have an attraction to all visual arts, in particular photography. As a result, I was drawn to the study of optical physics due to the imaging and design involved. My initial interest

evolved from the desire to improve my skills at photographing the reality around me in a clear and clean way, avoiding filters and aberrations, and later, as a doctor, focusing on the physiological process of vision.

Second, I was attracted to ophthalmology because I was allowed to personally follow my patients through each step of the diagnostic and therapeutic process. I have always loved the mix of medical and surgical implications related to each therapeutic approach to the eye, and I tried during my training to improve both my surgical skills and my biochemical knowledge of whatever disease I was treating. During my residency and fellowship, the desire to improve my surgical skills caused me to focus on basic science research and then on getting proper surgical training on the newest technologies for refractive and corneal microsurgery. I maintain an interest in implementing new technologies to provide the best possible treatment. I share my findings with the ophthalmic community through the peer-reviewed publication of my research.

What is unique about your approach to treating patients?

I aim to recognize the first, subtle symptoms of a specific disease in order to determine an effective diagnostic approach. Also, I try to guarantee that each patient receives the most effective treatment option. I do this by attending international ophthalmology meetings, reading the peer-reviewed literature, and watching surgical videos and tutorials. These are at times overwhelming with my already hectic schedule, but they are effective ways to stay up to date on the latest medical and surgical treatments.

What has been the biggest challenge of your career?

Staying on the cutting edge of ophthalmology and gaining technical and surgical skills are not the biggest challenge, as I had expected during my training. Once I started practicing, I soon realized that the most challenging part

of being an ophthalmologist is meeting patients' expectations, which are often fueled by wrong information from relatives, friends, and gossipy newspapers. Each patient comes into my examination room with a specific expectation, which is not always related to obtaining the best quality of vision without optical aids or relieving pain. Their expectations are often to find a doctor who will take care of them and solve their concerns and fears about the nature, history, and future progression of their disease.

One of the questions I hear frequently from patients after their first diagnosis of any ophthalmic disease is, "Will I become blind?" In that moment, they expect that I will use all of my knowledge and skills to treat them, but before I do that, they want to be comforted and encouraged.

What is your advice to the next generation of cataract and refractive surgeons?

Wake up every day thinking of the motto "To be, to know, to do," as my mentor used to tell me. I would also like to add that you should treat each patient as you would if he or she were your mother, father, sweetheart, or child.

How do you spend your leisure time?

Traveling, sailing, and exploring new horizons are my favorite ways to spend leisure time. My family and my camera are my best mates in these adventures. I like to document a bit of each country I visit without building up false expectations and keeping my mind, eyes, and senses open to surprises and my attitude open to be fascinated by my surroundings. ■

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