

Vance Thompson, MD

Dr. Thompson discusses his passion for serving his patients and the challenges of being an investigator.



What is your greatest motivator to practice refractive surgery?

I love to make people happy and serve others. Whether it is a patient, fellow team member, my family, or a friend, what brings me the greatest joy is playing a role in bringing them happiness. What that means to me, with regard to refractive surgery, is being a good educator about options and then delivering quality surgery to my patients.

Which surgical cases do you find the most enjoyable to perform and most rewarding once successfully completed?

Because I perform all modern types of refractive, corneal, phakic, and cataract surgery, what brings me the greatest feeling of accomplishment is minimizing my patients' refractive error at all distances. In a younger patient with a well-functioning lens, I can achieve this goal with corneal or phakic IOL refractive surgery. In a patient with a cloudy lens, I can accomplish my target with a multifocal or accommodating implant followed by a corneal enhancement if necessary. It is a great feeling when my patients achieve quality vision at all distances.

What do you consider to be the most exciting surgical development that you have been a part of and why?

Being a principal investigator in the development of excimer laser-based PRK, LASIK, and phototherapeutic keratectomy will be what I look back on as pivotal moments in my career. I had the honor of doing a refractive surgery fellowship with one of the greatest people and surgeons I have ever met, Daniel S. Durrie, MD, in 1990. I studied with Dr. Durrie when he was performing pivotal early research on excimer lasers. It was a privilege to work with him during this period, and I continued that research in my home state of South Dakota. The excimer laser was the game changer in refractive surgery, in my opinion, and it catapulted research and development in all areas of corneal, phakic, and pseudo-phakic IOL research.

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What are some of the challenges that you deal with as a principal investigator in clinical trials?

Because research and the development of new technology constitute 30% of my professional life, I accept the challenges that these aspects of my career bring daily. Although I would like to see more efficiency in certain aspects, the FDA’s approval process fascinates me in general. The world looks to the United States and its FDA-monitored approval process of new technology and may wish they moved faster, but ultimately, it is the most respected process. I am honored to be involved with it. However, it is the greatest test I address as a researcher, and it should be. Being involved with the development of protocols, strategizing how best to set up a trial to maximize the chance of FDA approval, and recruiting patients and delivering a quality new technology or surgery—all while protecting patients’ safety—are the greatest and most satisfying challenges I deal with professionally as an investigator and researcher.

What do you enjoy most about owning the Jessup Cellars Winery in Napa Valley, California?

The answer to this question is very similar to my answer to the first question. Whether it is a customer, fellow wine team member, my family, or my friends, what brings me the greatest joy is having a role in bringing them happiness. The mystery of how a well-made wine touches one’s soul brings a mist to my eyes. When you truly love making people happy like I do, you are moved when you bring a smile to their faces by touching them deeply with a handcrafted wine or bringing clear visual freedom to their lives. I am honored to be delivering both. ■