

# Ophthalmology Alliances: There Is Strength in Numbers

This new column will examine eye care issues from different angles.

**BY KENNETH A. BECKMAN, MD**

Welcome to the first edition of “Ophthalmology 360,” a collaborative project with members of Cornea, External Disease and Refractive Surgery (CEDARS), American Society of Progressive Enterprising Surgeons (ASPENS), and Vanguard Ophthalmology Society (VOS), looking at some of the latest hot topics in ophthalmology. In this article, I will provide some background information on each of these groups and discuss the emerging presence of ophthalmology alliances.

## **FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN**

As new ophthalmologists come out of residency and begin their careers, they often have a feeling of fear of the unknown. No longer do they have the security of the attending physician overseeing surgery or waiting down the hall to discuss a case. There is also the pressure of trying to build a practice in this era of decreasing reimbursement and increasing costs. It is very difficult to start a private practice, and it can be a challenge to find the right fit as an associate.

Some physicians may thrive in their early career but then hit the mid-career lull when monotony may set in. Many are then looking for ways to reinvent themselves and reinvigorate their careers. Other physicians may be at a later stage in their career but want to provide guidance to younger ophthalmologists. The opportunity to mentor a young physician may be what is missing from some doctors' everyday practice. These alliances have formed around the varying situations affecting ophthalmologists. In this column, three new ophthalmology alliances will collaborate in a monthly discussion of the latest issues in the specialty. Next, I introduce the three groups.

## **CORNEA, EXTERNAL DISEASE AND REFRACTIVE SURGERY**

CEDARS was founded in 2011. Initially, this organization was developed by a group of anterior segment

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specialists as a sounding board. The members regularly shared difficult cases on e-mail chats, discussed practice patterns and career development, and made an effort to meet at most of the large ophthalmology meetings. Although there was a social aspect as well, the members quickly realized that this was an opportunity to collaborate on projects and make an impact on ophthalmology. Through associations with industry, CEDARS provides opportunities for its members to participate in research, teach, and speak at the podium at major meetings. With a current membership of 24 and growing, CEDARS continues to engage in cutting-edge ophthalmology.

## **AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PROGRESSIVE ENTERPRISING SURGEONS**

ASPENS is an ophthalmologic surgeon group for women whose primary interests are research, education, leadership, and innovation in ophthalmology. ASPENS envisions a small working group of ophthalmologists who already are or will become key opinion leaders in the field. Through this group whose membership is currently 24, women are uniting to help shape the practice of ophthalmology for both sexes.

The group focuses on working and consulting with industry, serving on advisory boards, and being prominent speakers and participants at ophthalmology meetings. Many members do this already, but by combining

skills, knowledge, and contacts, they aim to be even stronger and more influential. ASPENS members seek to develop education for primary care eye doctors and treatment paradigms beginning with ocular surface disease.

ASPENS plans to participate as a partner or sister organization to CEDARS. One unique aspect of the former is the wide range of experience in its membership. This gives more seasoned physicians the ability to mentor the next generation. It can otherwise be difficult for a young physician to break into the types of activities described herein or even to know that these opportunities exist.

### **VANGUARD OPHTHALMOLOGY SOCIETY**

VOS was formed by 10 members in September 2009 to recognize and unite future thought leaders in ophthalmologic subspecialties related to the anterior segment. The current membership of 30 individuals represents a wide professional and geographic demographic. Initiatives include the advancement of ophthalmology through sharing innovative ideas on topics related to research and development of future medical and surgical therapeutics, diagnostics, informatics, marketing, practice development, ethics, and philanthropy.

The VOS meets biannually at the meetings of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery to identify and develop future ophthalmic trends. VOS members also meet annually at the organization's own conference.

VOS has partnered closely with industry to help guide the future direction of both surgical and pharmaceutical aspects of ophthalmology. An annual VOS award has also been presented to an outstanding fellow in anterior segment surgery.

### **CONCLUSION**

These are just three of the many new ophthalmology alliances that are forming. Each is making an impact in its own way, through teaching, research, speaking, and innovation. The members of CEDARS, ASPENS, and VOS look forward to providing provocative and meaningful discussions every month in this column. We hope you enjoy the new column! ■

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