



Parting Words



A fellow shares his letters of thanks to his mentors.

BY M. AMIR MOAREFI, MD

Fellowship—the final transition between medical training and practice—provides one last opportunity for practitioners to fine-tune and hone their skills before being set free to put everything they have learned in the past 13 years into motion. For some fellows, myself included, it is dearly important to choose wisely where they will train and who they will train with.

Spending my rotation at Clear Choice Custom LASIK Center and Cleveland Eye Clinic in Ohio, as part of my residency curriculum at Case Western University Hospital, changed the whole trajectory of my career. I met William F. Wiley, MD, during my first visit to the practice, and his warm welcome and genuine excitement for the work he performs were the prompts I needed to solidify my

decision to pursue refractive surgery. Witnessing someone in my field doing exactly what he loves lit a fire in me that I know will burn throughout my career.

During my first visit to Clear Choice, I must not have said a word—which if you know me is highly uncharacteristic. Standing there wide-eyed, I was too busy marveling at all of the procedures and technologies to speak. By my second visit, however, I could not help but ask a million questions. Most busy surgeons would try to steer clear of fielding so many questions, but Dr. Wiley answered every one. He also allowed me to witness the unbounded depths of his knowledge in patient care. He then gave me the best gift I could have professionally received at that stage in my career: an open door to spend time at his practice.

From that point on, all of my free time was spent at either Clear Choice or Cleveland Eye Clinic, watching Dr. Wiley in surgery and clinic. During one of my early visits, I met Shamik Bafna, MD, and Jeffrey Augustine, OD, who also encouraged my passion to learn. From my interactions with these three mentors, I realized that theirs was a practice that displayed the aspirations I had for my own career. When it came time for the San Francisco Match Fellowship application process, Drs. Wiley and Bafna invited me to spend a year with them as their first fellow. I was thrilled to accept, and I couldn't help but feel lucky for the opportunity.

With my fellowship now coming to a close, I have spent considerable time reflecting on the past year of practice with Drs. Wiley and Bafna and the Clear Choice and Cleveland Eye Clinic teams.

Dr. Moarefi (center), with the Bafnas (left) and the Wileys (right).



From left to right: Drs. Moarefi, Wiley, Bafna, and Augustine in Cancun, Mexico.

The experience that they have given me goes beyond comprehension. They have prepared me to enter the next stage of my career, and I will be forever grateful. Taking time to reflect and say thank you to my mentors, who have created huge imprints on my career and my life, I have drafted letters to each of them.

There are so many other individuals who play vital roles in the way the Clear Choice Custom LASIK Center and Cleveland Eye Clinic organizations run, and each one of them has contributed to my overall positive fellowship experience. I will always remember them with fondness as well, but it is my mentors who I will have the hardest time leaving.

DEAR DR. WILEY,



There is not much I can say about you that most people don't already know. You are an incredible surgeon and a compassionate clinician, with a side of astute business acumen. The baseline

level of enthusiasm you carry for your work is contagious. To me, all of your major accomplishments are stepping stones to what you will achieve and provide to the fields of ophthalmology and patient care in the years to come.

You are the alchemical reaction when pure natural talent is combined with astounding dedication for improvement. For me as a young surgeon watching you in your 15th year of practice, constantly seeking ways to improve patient care, has been like receiving two large-bore intravenous injections of energy. Your dedication to your craft has taught me to "try to leave the eye as if it has never been touched" after each cataract surgery. You have helped me cultivate my skills to not only improve my efficiency, but also to teach me the surgical finesse I need to obtain postoperative week 1 results on postoperative day 1.

Watching you perform cataract surgery is captivating. You would think after watching someone perform thousands of procedures that I would have gotten bored of watching. But watching a master surgeon, whose every move is deliberate and effective, is like watching a conductor lead a symphony orchestra. We could be in the middle of a 40-patient cataract surgery day, and mid-cortical cleanup in one case you might ask, "Hey Amir, what do you think about..." before dishing out another innovative pearl that could further improve your technique. Your admiration for your colleagues, your staff, and everyone you come into contact with is humbling. What

truly sets you apart is that you treat everyone, myself included, as your equal. You are eager to learn and to make every day a step in the forward direction. I sometimes wonder if you have the inspirational quote, "I did not come this far to only go this far," tattooed on your brain. What you have taught me about being available for patients is another impressive aspect of your dedication to this profession. Seeing your compassion for patients, and then entrusting me with the responsibility to treat them myself, has been an honor.

Dr. Wiley, you are truly an amazing physician, but you are also so much more. I have been fortunate to get to know you on a personal level (and you can be pretty hilarious during a flight). Of course we connected over sports, but the thing I love the most about you is the love you have for your wife and kids—that is one thing I did not expect to learn from this fellowship. There is a glimmer in your eyes when you speak about your love and support for Kerry, Ruby, and George.

You are a true leader. You are not only dedicated to success, but you imbue everyone around you with greatness, not to boast but to unite and move everyone forward together. You have done so much for me in my career, and you will never truly know the depths of my respect and love for you. I promise that I will always carry your work ethic and life morals with me, I will apply them to myself and to my own practice, and I will aim to make you proud wherever my career takes me.

DEAR DR. BAFNA,



The way you live your life is an inspiration to me and to everyone around you. Your attention to detail is something I have never seen before. Every patient who is lucky enough to be treated by you can be assured you have triple checked—maybe even quadruple checked—every test, scan, and calculation. It is special to be around you because, even at such a high level in your career, you have shared with me your reflections on your journey and how it is important to appreciate every step of the process.

You have encouraged me to do the same with my journey, but you are also quick to whip me back on track when I spend too long admiring the moment.

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Dr. Bafna, you are pure grit and hustle. Your incredible surgical skills can be attributed to your persistence and focus, and this is something I will take with me into the next stage of my career. I aspire to achieve your soft surgical touch with grace. As a testament to your preparation, the power of your surgical planning and decisions make each case look effortless. You challenge me in every surgery to sharpen my decisions with gentle accuracy.

Beyond your exceptional taste in clothing, what I most admire about you is how you make yourself available. You always take time to teach me, no matter what I am curious about. You also take time to sit down with the nurses and technicians to make sure everyone is familiar with the practice's mission and purpose.

Your deep commitment to learning is also inspirational. Of the assignments you've given to me, you've often learned it yourself—and subsequently taught it to me first—before I could even do the proper research. You have been an incredible mentor, providing constant insight into the challenges of running a business and being an ethical physician.

But what you make look effortless is how lucidly your love flows for your beautiful wife Shalini and your kids Shivani and Shreyans. All of your professional accomplishments are overshadowed by how proud you are of your family. You never shy away from displaying your devotion to them, and I feel lucky to have witnessed it firsthand. Whether you are dropping some hot rap lyrics by Drake in the OR or planning your next international vacation, it is always a pleasure spending time with you.

Dr. Bafna, you have taught me responsibility and how to hold myself accountable for my growth and success. I appreciate your guidance and always joke (even though it's not a joke) that I look forward to our life-long relationship.

DEAR DR. AUGUSTINE,



My reflections would not be complete without thanking you! Your uncanny ability to connect with any patient who walks through the door is inspiring; you understand just how to give each one a sense of comfort. You have spent a lot of time gifting me with this quality, and that is something I will always remember.

Refractive surgery has a completely different patient population from what I was used to in residency, and the dedication you have to being the best at patient care is contagious. The wisdom of your decisions and the dedication that you have for the practice are highly valued by Drs. Bafna and Wiley, and your work together is beautifully parallel.

Thank you for inviting me into your home so many times, even making sure I wasn't alone for Thanksgiving. We have developed a friendship that I will forever cherish. ■

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- Financial disclosure: None