



Figures. The directors and cofounders of OCL, from left to right, Dr. Barsam, Ali A. Mearza, MBBS, FRCOphth, and Romesh Angunawela, BM, MD, FRCOphth, FRCS, Cert LRS, during the ribbon-cutting ceremony for OCL Vision (1). Dr. Barsam with his wife, Sarah, after a 10-km race (2). Dr. Barsam with his wife and two of their children, Joseph (left) and Raphael (right), at a community fun run (3).



EXERCISING AND INTROSPECTION FOR ENERGY, FOCUS, CALM, AND PARTNERSHIP



Exercise enhances my performance and enriches my experiences in every aspect of my life.

BY ALLON BARSAM, MD, MA, FRCOPHTH

I am so immersed in work that I find it difficult to think about anything else, but the pastimes that I enjoy the most are sports and exercise.

EXERCISE

I've been doing some form of exercise since I was a teenager, and I played university-level tennis. Nowadays, my routine is five 45-minute exercise sessions per week, and I've learned to make those sessions efficient. One aspect of exercise is that the more I do it, the better I become at it, and the more I can accomplish in a set amount of time.

The exercises I do vary. I usually do a CrossFit-type workout once or twice a week, a high-intensity exercise with running and weights once or twice a week, and weight training typically

once a week. I also do a standalone run once per week. In total, I try to run about 20 km per week. I may do an organized or competitive run once or twice a year, but I don't need one on the horizon to push myself to train hard.

I generally exercise first thing in the morning—before my children are awake—so that I don't feel like I'm losing time when I might be productive at something else. Exercise gets my mind off the natural stress of being an ophthalmologist looking after a lot of patients. I also hope that staying active with exercise and sports will prolong my career by keeping my body healthy. There's a physicality to ophthalmology—moving patients and completing multiple surgeries per hour, for example. I find that exercise improves my strength and stamina

at work and increases my level of concentration and calm.

THEOLOGY AND THE ARTS

I have other interests apart from exercise and ophthalmology. Most people who go into medicine are scientists at heart. When I was going into university, that was clearly my focus, but I have also always had a creative side. Creativity and thinking outside the box are skills that aid with problem-solving in terms of seeking innovative solutions to medical and surgical problems as well as practice management and business development.

I am interested in and appreciate the arts and music as well as history, current events, and politics. In university, I studied theology, which looks at religious, philosophical, and

cultural ideologies. I am lucky to have benefitted from the traditional academic tools in university to try to objectively understand, study, and analyze these subjects. I still have a strong interest in the discipline. It requires a different way of thinking than the binary scientific way required in most aspects of my work, and I find it particularly useful during patient interactions.

I have also developed an interest in psychology. I feel it helps me understand my patients better, but it is also a powerful tool for calm, self-awareness, and self-regulation. These attributes are required not only to have the necessary composure and presence of mind for clinical and surgical practice but also to be a good corporate partner for my practice, OCL Vision (Figure 1).

I also enjoy going to art exhibitions when I have the opportunity. I have four children (15, 14, 10, and 8 years of age) and often bring them along. I practice in London, so it is easy to find two or three theatrical productions to see each year. Making the time to indulge these interests is difficult, however, and staying active takes precedence for me.

FAMILY TIME

As I get older, I get better about leaving the stress and preoccupation of work at the door so that I can focus on my family (Figures 2 and 3). For me, the key is to put my phone away. Being out of the house also helps, so we go for walks, play sports, and schedule infrequent holidays. My family loves to ski and spend time together in the mountains. I try to be mentally—not just physically—present during that time. ■

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