



50 YEARS OF THE ASCRS

Past and present chief medical editors of *CRST* reflect on the impact ASCRS has had.



DAVID F. CHANG MD

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“ASCRS was essentially ophthalmology’s first surgical subspecialty society. It was founded 50 years ago to fill an important but unmet need for education about a controversial new technology. Cataract surgeons needed a more progressive organization and a forum through which they could learn about IOLs, share their experiences, collaborate on research, train their colleagues, and eventually define clinical best practices. Over the next half-century, this cycle was repeated for every major advance in anterior segment surgery, including phacoemulsification, keratorefractive surgery, refractive IOLs, biometry and IOL formulas, noncapsular IOL fixation, lamellar corneal transplantation, femtosecond laser–assisted cataract surgery, and MIGS. A society devoted to anterior segment surgery brought that focus to its conferences, peer-reviewed and trade journals, online education, legislative advocacy, and philanthropy. The ASCRS Film Festival, which was the brainchild of Spencer Thornton, MD, and David Karcher, celebrated the emerging and quintessential role of video for teaching surgical techniques.

Today, most major countries have their own national cataract and refractive surgery society modeled after ASCRS and, in many cases, founded with the help and initial support of ASCRS. As a result, no other single organization has had a greater impact on innovation and the dissemination of new anterior segment surgical technology and techniques worldwide. Finally, at a time when academicians controlled most of what was presented at the AAO annual meeting, ophthalmologists in private practice founded ASCRS and have played a key role in the organization ever since. I am personally grateful for the opportunities that ASCRS gave me, a private practitioner, to contribute to our profession over the course of my career.”



ERIC D. DONNENFELD, MD

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“We ophthalmologists live in the sacrosanct world of improving vision and quality of life for patients. No specialty is more life-changing than ours, and ASCRS and *CRST* are at the core of this world by providing the information we require on a regular basis. Today, we celebrate 50 years of ASCRS and the important role *CRST* has played in telling us the stories that are meaningful to anterior segment surgeons.

I have been privileged to be a reader of, contributor to, and chief medical editor of *CRST* and have observed its maturation into one of the preeminent periodicals in ophthalmology—a must-read for all of us who seek to incorporate in-depth, balanced, clinician-oriented, state-of-the-art information into our ever-expanding specialty. *CRST* partners with anterior segment surgeons to provide updates on the latest and most important advances in our field in terms of surgery, medicine, and practice management. I have observed *CRST* from its earliest days, and as a busy practicing ophthalmologist, I read every issue with gusto. My compliments to the chefs—*CRST*’s editors and staff—who prepare such a wonderful edition every month.

ASCRS has helped revolutionize anterior segment surgery. Virtually every advance we have seen—from the use of IOLs (which was originally controversial) to laser vision correction, MIGS, and advanced corneal transplantation techniques—has been pioneered and taught through ASCRS. My heartfelt congratulations to the organization on 50 extraordinary years.”

**JOHN F. DOANE, MD, FACS**

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“ASCRS at 50—wow! Time flies for sure. I have attended 32 years of ASCRS annual meetings, missing only July 2022 in Las Vegas. Couldn’t do that hot one. Frankly, I could not imagine my ophthalmology experience without ASCRS. It was the first national meeting I attended as a second-year resident, when I presented two free papers in 1992 in Boston. I did my fellowship interview with Steve Slade there, which started my path into refractive surgery.

ASCRS opened up my world to international ophthalmology, for which I am most thankful. Over time, introductions to other surgeons at ASCRS allowed me to attend or be invited to meetings on six continents. Today, the annual ASCRS meeting remains a must-go meeting for me to witness the latest in cataract and refractive surgery and reconnect with surgeon friends, industry representatives, entrepreneurs, and investors in the ophthalmic space from across the globe. It is truly energizing each year.

I am proud of my active and continued association with ASCRS and excited for the future. Congratulations and many thanks to all those who have made ASCRS so successful in the past and present. I wish the best to all involved going forward!”

**STEVEN J. DELL, MD**

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“Most of us can recall our first ASCRS meeting. I know I can, and it felt as though I had finally found ‘my crowd’ in ophthalmology. As my career gravitated more toward the refractive and cataract arena, ASCRS meetings and publications became a much better fit for my interests than the offerings of the AAO. Each organization serves a different function, and arguably other smaller meetings have come to provide a more meaningful educational experience. For sheer comprehensiveness, however, nothing can beat an ASCRS meeting. Through its collaboration with the ESCRS, the *Journal of Cataract & Refractive Surgery* provides an unparalleled resource for those of us who work in this space.

ASCRS began as a nimble, alternative protest organization to the sclerotic status quo of the time. The impetus for this was a changing technological landscape and an emerging emphasis on the pursuit of cutting-edge phaco and IOL technology. The growth of refractive surgery transformed ASCRS into the organization it is today. As ASCRS begins to rival AAO in size, I hope in the next 50 years the organization retains its emphasis on embracing disruptive technologies and procedures for the benefit of our patients, while advocating for surgeons in an always challenging political environment.”

**CATHLEEN M. MCCABE, MD**

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“ASCRS is unique among the many ophthalmic societies that we are privileged to have because its focus since inception has been on educating surgeons in order to elevate surgical eye care. The content is excellent, with dedicated educators striving to create a curriculum that is as broad as it is deep and directly applicable to the needs of surgeons at all stages of their careers. The YES [Young Eye Surgeons] program has continued to grow over the years and now plays an important role in connecting young ophthalmologists with each other. The annual meeting then becomes the place where lifelong friendships are created and nourished, with

attendance a chance to reconnect, share ideas, and leave renewed, reenergized, and armed with the latest thoughts and tools for elevating patient care.

ASCRS is the invisible glue that binds us together with a shared passion and purpose, a focus on improving vision and empowering lives, and bonds that grow stronger as we share study data, skill development in the wet lab, impromptu chats in the hallway, and time to relax or party for the purpose of raising funds to support the ASCRS Foundation. I am grateful for the relationships, knowledge, skills, and memories I have gained through my involvement with ASCRS.”



50 YEARS OF THE ASCRS



ROBERT J. WEINSTOCK, MD

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“My journey with the ASCRS began in an unexpected surge of awe when I attended the ASCRS meeting with my father as a medical student, uncertain of my future in ophthalmology. Yet, as I walked onto that showroom floor, the panorama of innovations unfolded before me—bright lights, state-of-the-art machines, instruments, and the buzz of passionate professionals. The scale of the event left me in sheer wonderment at the vastness of the field. It was a spectacle of medical advancement that firmly decided my path; from that moment, I was unequivocally committed to ophthalmology.

The lectures I attended were nothing short of inspirational, introducing me to legends in our field—Richard L. Lindstrom, MD, Richard J. Mackool, MD, and Marguerite McDonald, MD, FACS—giants upon whose shoulders the industry has risen. As I navigated the showroom and took in the plethora of new technologies, I realized the possibilities that lay within my chosen field.

Since that formative experience, I have not missed a single ASCRS meeting. Over the years, it has become a beacon of progress, consistently revealing the latest and greatest in

ophthalmology. Beyond its educational aspect, ASCRS has been the crucible for relationships and friendships that I treasure deeply. It’s a social tapestry, woven from the threads of shared passion and purpose, where I reconnect with peers from around the world—some I see only at these gatherings.

ASCRS transcends being merely an educational event; it’s a source of personal and professional rejuvenation. The sense of community, the immediacy of learning, and the opportunity to exchange ideas in the flesh are irreplaceable. While we’ve embraced virtual means of connection, they pale compared to the richness of in-person interactions—the handshakes, the spontaneous debates after lectures, the tactile experience of the latest technology.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the founders of ASCRS for crafting this indispensable platform for cataract and refractive surgeons globally. They’ve created not just an event but a legacy that continually fosters excellence and camaraderie in ophthalmology. As we celebrate 50 years of ASCRS, I look back with gratitude and forward with anticipation. I am eager for the innovations and connections that await us at future gatherings.”



STEPHEN G. SLADE, MD

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“Congratulations to ASCRS! Many of us grew up alongside ASCRS, from one small hotel meeting room in Los Angeles to our largest gathering of educators, industry leaders, and friends in one place. That’s not to mention the social aspects of the meeting, which is as much fun as college but far less expensive. ASCRS is a candy store of what we want most.

ASCRS has always been relevant in the political landscape of eye care. The organization was founded in part to protect and promote IOLs, and when LASIK was challenged, there was ASCRS at the FDA hearing to protect the procedure for patients.

Please, 50 more years for ASCRS. They have earned it! ASCRS truly is our forever fellowship.” ■

A NEED FOR SCIENTIFIC RIGOR



Manus C. Kraff, MD, a founding member and past president (1983–1985) of the ASCRS, reflects on the organization’s early days.

BY GILLIAN MCDERMOTT, MA, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, CLINICAL CONTENT, ANTERIOR SEGMENT, BMC VISION

CRST: What was the impetus for creating the ASCRS?

Manus C. Kraff, MD: ASCRS was created because ophthalmology at that time was starting to talk about IOLs, and the people who were doing IOLs could not get any space in journals or in meetings. It was kind of a taboo subject, especially with academia. The idea was to form a society that would put emphasis on these subjects that were not being permitted in other journals.

CRST: What were the founding members’ goals for the organization?

Dr. Kraff: We were looking to find an organization that

would sponsor the formation of the science of lens implantation. At that time, there was not much control over the publication of papers as far as their scientific merit. This became relevant with radial keratotomy as well. There was no organization to make sure that papers and people trying to market these procedures and technologies did not make wild claims. We were trying to give some legitimacy to people who were starting to do work in lens implantation and refractive surgery. We wanted to make sure that the material that was being promoted was scientifically substantiated with data collection.

CRST: What were the organization’s greatest early achievements?

Dr. Kraff: When this society was first formed, the burden on its members was to create scientific credibility. The main achievements were the creation of a scientifically responsible journal and meeting. The papers that were submitted for publication and presentation were done in a scientific manner. Legitimate research was required to promote the science of lens implantation and, later, refractive surgery. The goal was to develop a society based on education and research. ■



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