

Building the Future of Ophthalmology: YMDC Brings Mentorship, Innovation, and Industry Together at AAO 2025

Early-career ophthalmologists gathered with thought leaders and industry experts at YMDC's capstone event to discuss mentorship and the future of ophthalmic innovation.

YoungMD Connect (YMDC) recently hosted its capstone mentorship and networking event at the 2025 American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Annual Meeting in Orlando, where early-career ophthalmologists connected with key leaders in the field and representatives from top industry organizations. During this event, medical students, residents, fellows, and early-career ophthalmologists were able to experience the power of building connections among peers and mentors, and prepare for a successful future in ophthalmology.

A NIGHT OF CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION

The event brought together 160 attendees, including residents, fellows, medical students, practicing ophthalmologists, and mentors. Throughout the evening, they participated in an inspiring program that featured a panel discussion, interactive mentorship rotations, and a vibrant networking reception (Figure 1).

PANEL INSIGHTS: PARTNERING FOR INNOVATION AND GROWTH

The evening began with an engaging panel led by William B. Trattler, MD (refractive, corneal, and cataract eye surgeon at the Center for Excellence in Eye Care in Miami, Florida) and featured Kelly Vaupel (US Marketing Senior Director at Johnson & Johnson Vision) and Jason Rothenhaus (General Manager, Eye Care, Ocular Surface, and Glaucoma at AbbVie; Figure 2). The discussion emphasized collaboration between surgeons and industry to drive innovation and support early-career ophthalmologists.

Dr. Trattler emphasized the vital role of industry partners in helping early-career ophthalmologists transition from training to independent practice, including facilitating access to new technologies and support in the operating room.

Both panelists highlighted their companies' commitment to mentorship, education, and innovation. Ms. Vaupel introduced Johnson & Johnson Vision's new mentorship pilot program that pairs six mentors with 12 mentees, with plans for expansion. Mr. Rothenhaus discussed AbbVie's Institutions Team, created 3 years ago to directly support residents, fellows, and young ophthalmologists through surgical education and access to innovative treatments.

When speaking on the future of ophthalmology, Mr. Rothenhaus projected major advances in AI adoption, noting that 70% of ophthalmologists plan to use AI for diagnostics in the coming



Figure 1. Attendees enjoyed a warm evening outside during the networking reception.



Figure 2. Panelists Kelly Vaupel (Johnson & Johnson Vision), Jason Rothenhaus (AbbVie), and William B. Trattler, MD, in discussion.

Advice for Early-Career Ophthalmologists

- ▶ Engage with mentorship/training programs to accelerate skills and connections.
- ▶ Share real-world insights with companies. If you observe study ideas or technique tweaks in practice, reach out. Bi-directional feedback can improve patient care.
- ▶ Explore AI readiness. Begin learning and applying AI tools as diagnostic adoption grows.

year. Both panelists agreed the current innovation in cataract and refractive surgery, combined with data-driven care, will reshape practice patterns and improve treatment outcomes for patients.

Dr. Trattler closed the panel by urging young ophthalmologists to engage actively with mentorship and industry programs to accelerate their careers and drive innovation in eye care.

LEARNING FROM LEADERS

Known for its thought-provoking discussion, the mentorship rotations featured 21 faculty members representing retina, cornea, refractive, glaucoma, oculoplastics, and pediatric ophthalmology subspecialties (Figure 3).

These sessions encouraged open discussions in an intimate setting that were conducted in an "ask me anything" format, allowing attendees to cover a range of topics.



Figure 3. Attendees engaged in robust discussion during mentorship rotations.

LOOKING TO 2026

At the core of YMDC events is a goal for members to embrace lifelong curiosity, while building networks across peers, mentors, and industry. The next YMDC Capstone event will take place at the 2026 AAO Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana.

To stay connected and explore future opportunities, visit www.youngmdconnect.com. ■