

# UMASS INSIGHT



UMASS MEMORIAL  
EYE CENTER

*News from the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences*

Summer 2022

## THE VISION FOR VISION

We recently reviewed the incredible progress made in each of the key mission areas at UMass Chan Medical School's Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences. Some highlights include the establishment of the Ophthalmology residency program, the emergence of Ophthalmology as the number one surgical department in external research funding and the meteoric growth of the UMass Memorial Eye Center practice. These successes are a tribute to the leadership of Department Chair, **Dr. Shlomit Schaal**, and the teamwork of the department's faculty, learners and staff. Congratulations to all!!



While I am certain that Dr. Schaal and her team could readily answer the question of what's next, allow me to address this question from a broader perspective. UMass Chan's five-year strategic plan, IMPACT 2025, is focused on six pillars: (1) Education, (2) Basic Science Research, (3) Translational Research, (4) Community and Global Impact, (5) Operational Excellence and Financial Stewardship, and (most recently added) (6) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). While the school's overarching mission remains similar to that in previous plans, the addition of our responsibility to diverse communities is noteworthy:

"Our mission is to advance the health and wellness of our diverse communities throughout Massachusetts and across the world by leading and innovating in education, research, health care delivery and public service."

The Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences' core mission is, therefore, to train the health care workforce who will provide needed care in the coming decades for the diverse people of Massachusetts and the world to advance their eye health.

The ability to see is pivotal to the quality of the human experience. Many with normal vision too often take for granted the gift of sight, and how it enables written communication, interpersonal interaction and aesthetic appreciation. In 2022, our patients live longer, and therefore experience aging to a greater extent. This further heightens the value of preserving and correcting vision through direct patient care, training of future eye physicians, and expanding scientific knowledge of ocular wellness and disease treatment.

We are grateful to have a department here at UMass Chan Medical School that is advancing the mission with unbounded enthusiasm and ambition. I have no doubt, "The Future is Bright!"

**Terence Flotte, MD**, Dean, UMass Chan Medical School

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### EYE MYTHS: FACT OR FICTION

Social Media Campaign  
Around Eye Myths

Find us online for the latest, research, publications, faculty updates & more at [www.umassmed.edu/ophthalmology](http://www.umassmed.edu/ophthalmology)

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UMASS MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER

 **UMass Chan**  
MEDICAL SCHOOL

# UMASS INSIGHT

News from the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences

## CHAIR INSIGHT: DARE TO DREAM - CELEBRATING OUR RESIDENTS AND NEW EYE CENTER MILESTONES AND MEMORIES

“If you build it, they will come.” This famous line from the popular movie “Field of Dreams” especially rings true in the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences today with not one, but two unbelievable dreams coming to life right before our eyes!

### Congratulations to Our Graduates

To begin, on June 24, we celebrated the graduation of very first residents! This is a historic moment that fills me with pride and joy for our residents, our program, and the people who poured so much of their time, energy, and love into creating the exceptional program we offer today.

When I became Chair of this department in 2016, we did not have a residency program. Within a year, I hired **Dr. Misha Faustina** to serve as our Residency Program Director. And with the guidance of her Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP) mentors, she worked to design how our program would look, would work, and would nurture and develop the next generation of ophthalmologists. In 2018, our residency was approved by the ACGME – making it the first NEW ophthalmology residency program in 20 years!

In 2019, our first class of residents joined us, and today we have a full slate of eight very talented residents. I am exceptionally thankful to our residents for believing in us and entering our brand-new program. Today, we celebrate two shiny new graduates, **Dr. Soraiya Thura** and **Dr. Saad Al-Kadhi**, who have learned well, honed their skills, and are fully ready to enter the field of



ophthalmology. I’m proud to say that both physicians successfully matched to excellent fellowships where they will use what they learned here and will continue growing into the extraordinary ophthalmologists we know them to be. They will forever be dear members of Eye Team family!

Developing a residency program has been challenging, difficult and rewarding. I give my heartfelt thanks to our staff and residents for making us better every year!

### Welcome to UMass Memorial Eye Center at Northborough Crossing

Our second dream come true was realized in February when our beautiful new Eye Center opened at Northborough Crossing. This project was a labor of love and reflects the thoughts, vision and belief of everyone on our team. Our patients are thrilled and have delivered extremely high patient satisfaction scores since opening day. Special thanks to **Manisha Anand**, Office Supervisor, **David Rivera**, Lead Technician, **Katherine Ribeiro**, Manager of Ambulatory Operations, and our outstanding staff members for all of their efforts. You can read more about our new clinic in this edition.

**I wish all of you a very happy summer! This is a very exciting time for celebration! Congratulations!**

### Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM

Professor and Chair, Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, President, UMass Memorial Medical Group

Congratulations to Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM named to the list of

## 2022 POWER 50

Worcester Business Journal named Dr. Schaal one of the 50 most influential professionals in the Central Massachusetts business community.

Read Article:

[wbjournal.com/article/2022-power-50-dr-shlomit-schaal](http://wbjournal.com/article/2022-power-50-dr-shlomit-schaal)

## DR. SHLOMIT SCHAAL ELECTED TO AUPO BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Earlier this year, the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO) named **Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM**, President, UMass Memorial Medical Group, and Professor and Chair of the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, to their Board of Trustees.

“We are extremely impressed with your record of accomplishment and confident you will be an excellent addition to the AUPO leadership team,” wrote David Quillen, MD, Chair of Ophthalmology at Penn State College of Medicine and AUPO Nominating Committee Chair.

“Serving on the AUPO board of trustees is a priceless opportunity to help shape the future of academic ophthalmology,” said Dr. Schaal. “I embrace this role and I am humbled and delighted to serve AUPO.”



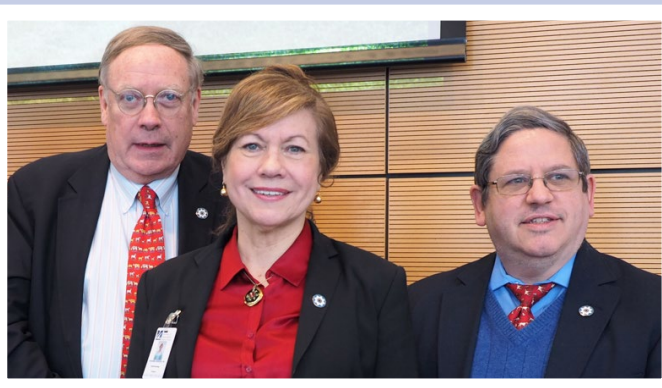
## GRATEFUL DONORS SUPPORT INNOVATION IN OPHTHALMOLOGY

Philanthropic support plays a critical role for UMass Chan Medical School faculty and UMass Memorial Eye Center staff. Gifts from private individuals and foundations allow our faculty and staff to pursue ideas that help us to advance our understanding of the eye, explore new treatments and most importantly help our patients receive state-of-the-art care for sight-threatening conditions.

### AMDF a Leading Donor to Macular Degeneration Research at UMass Chan

For Chip Goehring, who was diagnosed with macular degeneration, supporting research that has the potential to treat, cure or improve quality of life for those with this debilitating disease has become his passion; and the UMass Chan Medical School has been the proud beneficiary of his philanthropic efforts.

After his diagnosis, Goehring's goal was to learn everything he could about the disease. He was only 39 years old and the prospect of losing his sight within 20 years was devastating. The lack of information available became a call to action to help make an impact on this disease.



From left: John (Chip) Goehring, Dr. Johanna Seddon and Paul Gariepy

His research led him to **Johanna Seddon, MD, ScM**, who at the time was Director of the Epidemiology and Clinical Research Unit at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmiry. She has since joined the faculty at UMass Chan Medical School as a professor of ophthalmology & visual sciences and the director of the Retina and Macular Degeneration Center of Excellence.

“Dr. Seddon was the first researcher I could find who was focused on uncovering things that patients could do to change the trajectory of this disease,” Goehring said. “She is a pioneer in the study of macular diseases, and her discoveries continue

to inform educational initiatives at our organization.”

With the support from several friends, including attorney Paul F. Gariepy, Mr. Goehring established the Northampton-based American Macular Degeneration Foundation (AMDF) in 1996, a leading source of information for patients and funding for researchers. Since then, the foundation has raised millions of dollars and is a key funder of Dr. Seddon's research at UMass Chan.

### Patient Gives Back to Help Other With Eye Disease

Grateful patients of UMass Memorial often emerge as donors who wish to express their appreciation and extend support to the staff and departments that played meaningful roles in their care. Such is the case for Daniel and Theresa Hicks who recently made a generous gift to the UMass Memorial Eye Center.



Theresa and Daniel Hicks

“The Eye Center team helped stabilize my vision by delivering the highest quality of care through advanced technology, innovation and exceptionally skilled ophthalmologists,” said Mr. Hicks.

The Hicks are honored to know their contribution will help further advance eye care for all patients in our community.

“As we look to a future free of vision loss and other eye disease, the role of philanthropy is essential to our work,” **Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM** said. “We are so grateful to have the ongoing research support from the American Macular Degeneration Foundation and contributions from patients like Daniel Hicks and his wife Theresa, whose generosity helps us better provide the best care possible for countless people who suffer from eye disease.”

## FACULTY INSIGHT

**MISHA FAUSTINA, MD, FACS**  
**ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF OCULOPLASTIC SERVICES,**  
**RESIDENCY PROGRAM DIRECTOR**

“If you get ... give. If you learn ... teach.” The words of Maya Angelou are a driving force for **Misha Faustina, MD, FACS**. Bringing the clinical experience of private practice to academic medicine was my intended goal. “I learned the most from mentors who came back to teach,” says Dr. Faustina.

She spent a year teaching physical diagnosis between medical school and residency, then returned to her alma mater, Meharry Medical College, each year in the spring to lead the eye exam portion of the course. Finding ways to maintain an academic link extended to instructing medical students, resident physicians, ophthalmic technicians, and nurses locally in her Arizona practice, as well as coaching practicing ophthalmologists who were preparing for their board exams. Dr. Faustina was in private practice for 12 years before shifting into academic medicine full time.

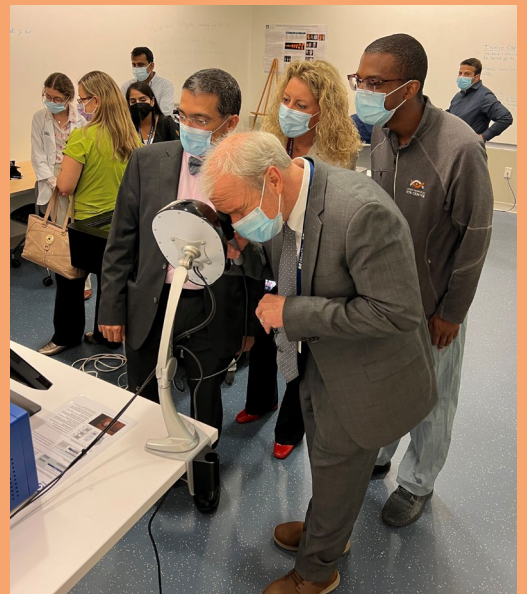
For the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, she has launched a Division of Oculoplastic Surgery, a highly detailed specialty for surgical repair of the eyelids, tear-drainage system, and bony orbit surrounding the eye, and is actively recruiting additional faculty for the burgeoning specialty service. This needed clinical service did not previously exist at UMass Memorial. Additionally, Dr. Faustina created a training program in eye surgery. It is the first Ophthalmology Residency Program at UMass, the first new ACGME-approved ophthalmology program in more than 20 years, and the first new four-year ophthalmology program with an integrated internship anywhere. This means that our residents are immersed in medical, surgical, emergency, and trauma services before their dedicated ophthalmic training, which helps to create diverse, broadly trained, well-rounded future colleagues.

## VIRTUAL EYE HOSPITAL

On Thursday, June 23, UMass Chan and UMass Memorial leaders and staff celebrated the creation of a state-of-the-art Virtual Eye Hospital at the Interprofessional Center for Experiential Learning & Simulation (iCELS) with a ribbon-cutting event.

Home to a collection of simulation-based tools, the Virtual Eye Hospital provides an environment for the learner to immerse in interactive practice where they gain valuable examination skills and proficiency in surgery – a place where missteps do not affect patients. Our goal is to

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State-of-the-art Virtual Eye Hospital at UMass Chan Medical School.



## RESIDENT INSIGHT

**THEY CAME. THEY LEARNED. THEY MADE A DIFFERENCE. THEY GRADUATED. CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR INAUGURAL CLASS OF RESIDENTS!**

On June 24, our inaugural class of residents graduated from our new Ophthalmology Residency program! This was a very proud day for our department as we watched two outstanding physicians complete this program following three years of very hard work. Sincere congratulations are extended to our graduates, **Soraiya Thura, MD**, and **Saad Al-Kadhi, MD, MS!**

Special thanks to our honorable guests, **Terence Flotte, MD**, Dean of the Medical School, **Michael Gustafson, MD**, President of UMass Memorial Medical Center, and **Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM**, President of UMass Memorial Medical Group and Chair of the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at UMass Memorial Health and UMass Chan Medical School, who kicked off the graduation festivities by sharing a few words of wisdom and best wishes with our new ophthalmologists as they launch their careers.

This was followed by an excellent State of the Department Address, presented by faculty members from the Ophthalmology Department, which highlighted the many achievements of the department over the past year, including the opening of the new UMass Memorial Eye Center at Northborough Crossing, and innovations in research and education.

After hearing from the ophthalmology team, the Educator of the Year Award was presented to our 2022 recipient, **Karen Jeng-Miller, MD, MPH**. The Educator of the Year Award is a very special and prestigious recognition as this person is chosen by our residents who select a teacher who has made a great impact on their education. The winner of this award is then invited to name the keynote speaker for the following year's graduation ceremony. Past winners of this award include 2020 – **Priya Janardhana, MD**, who invited John Gittinger, MD, Physician and Surgeon, Mass Eye and Ear, Senior Lecturer, Harvard Medical School, and former UMass Chair; and 2021 – **Benjamin Jastrzembski, MD**, who invited Ajoy Vincent, MBBS, MS, FRSCS, who addressed attendees at this year's graduation ceremony.

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# UMASS INSIGHT

News from the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences

## STAFF INSIGHT

### LORI MURNANE: CREATING THE MOST POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR OUR PATIENTS

Lori has been with UMass Memorial Eye Center for three years, but is no stranger to health care, having spent twenty-five years working in the health care industry. As a senior administrative secretary, she provides administrative support to **Dr. Haijiang Lin**, **Dr. Lianna Valdes** and **Dr. Johanna Seddon**. “It’s amazing to see how far we’ve come in the three years I’ve been here. We’ve won the Innovator of the Year Award and opened the new clinic in Northborough,” said Ms. Murnane.

A team player, Lori enjoys working with other administrative professionals in the Eye Center and at other offices, and she enjoys the close personal connections that form. She said, “I especially enjoy working with our physicians and admire their professionalism and am inspired by their knowledge. I also greatly enjoy my interactions with the patients by phone, because over time they get to know me not only as their physician’s admin, but also in a friendly, more personal way -- and I love that.” In her free time Lori enjoys country music and spending time with family and friends.

We appreciate Lori’s dedication and hard work in caring for our patients each and every day. The commitment, camaraderie, and collaboration among of our administrative professionals is unwavering and significantly contributes to our ability to serve our patients in the highest quality manner possible.



## STUDENT INSIGHT

### EVAN BILSBURY, MS2

**Evan Bilsbury** is a second-year medical student in the T.H. Chan School of Medicine. Evan knew he wanted to be a doctor from a young age, after enduring the loss of his infant brother and witnessing the support that had been provided to his family by the child’s medical team during months of treatment.

Evan has bachelor’s degrees in psychology and biology from Pennsylvania State University, where he minored in chemistry. He got involved in research related to psychology and neurology during his undergraduate career.

“I kind of wanted to be a talk therapist and work with clients that way. Then I got more interested in the biology of the brain and that led me down a new path,” he said.

When he started his studies at UMass Chan, Evan got involved in ophthalmology research — learning how the eye connects to the brain and how the retina works — and quickly fell in love with the field. He spent time during his first year working in a lab focused on gene therapy and retinitis pigmentosa, a disorder that causes childhood blindness, researching molecular pathways that lead to illness. Currently, he works in a lab focused on ocular gene therapy and macular degeneration with **Haijiang Lin, MD, PhD**, Associate Professor of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences.

Evan volunteers at the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, where he’s paired up with someone with a visual impairment to help them with everyday tasks such as shopping or reading mail.

He is also passionate about music. He plays guitar, bass, piano and drums, and he composes. One of the songs he composed is featured in this video where Evan shares his story: <https://bit.ly/3NYnXUL>. Evan said he’d love to connect his love for music to his career.



*Congratulations Eye Center*

**2021 INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR**  
**BRONZE-LEVEL IDEA**  
**PATIENT EXPERIENCE**

## UMASS MEMORIAL EYE CENTER CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING WITH RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY

On Tuesday, March 15, **Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM**, Chair of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at UMass Memorial Health and UMass Chan Medical School, and President, UMass Memorial Medical Group, welcomed almost 100 guests to the UMass Memorial Eye Center's grand opening and ribbon-cutting celebration. This day was a dream come true for those who began planning just over two years ago.

**Eric Dickson, MD**, President and Chief Executive Officer, UMass Memorial Health, and Dr. Schaal performed the ceremonial ribbon-cutting after brief remarks. "This is a special place not just because of the looks, but because of all the people on the Eye Center team who I know will take wonderful care of our patients," said Dr. Dickson.

Dr. Schaal echoed Dr. Dickson's sentiments and was thrilled to be together in person to celebrate this momentous occasion. "It was a labor of love and a team of amazing people that pulled this off in spite of COVID and many other obstacles," said Dr. Schaal.

From the shiny new technology, large, bright, and airy waiting areas, exam rooms outfitted with large monitors for viewing diagnostic imaging, and the gorgeous artwork from local artists, every detail is perfect.

Our marketing team recently launched an integrated marketing campaign. "Total Health Care for your Eyes," to promote the new and expanded Eye Center at Northborough Crossing and maintain awareness of the specialized eye care available at both the Northborough and Hahnemann



*Dr. Shlomit Schaal and Dr. Eric Dickson*

locations. Many of you may have seen the ads that ran in the Worcester Telegram and Community Advocate as well as online, digital ads.

Since it's opening, the Eye Center team in Northborough is seeing more patients every day and the feedback has been very positive. Patients appreciate the ease of scheduling an appointment, free parking, shorter wait times, and a smooth and high-quality experience. Positive word-of-mouth of our patients has also contributed to increasing patient volume.

We invite you to check out the UMass Memorial Eye Center's new Northborough digs. The team is thrilled to be providing the highest-quality care to our community in this clinic designed to ensure the smoothest delivery of patient care.



*Lauren Colwell, MD and Aron Sampson, MD*

## EYE MYTHS: FACT OR FICTION?

There are many things we've heard through the years about our eyes and their health. Eating carrots will improve your vision, using computers can damage your eyes, reading in dim light is harmful to your eyes, to name a few. UMass Memorial's Marketing and Communications Department teamed up with UMass Memorial Eye Center residents, **Aron Sampson, MD**, and **Lauren Colwell, MD**, to produce a social media campaign around eye myths. The goal of the campaign was to debunk many of these myths. Check out the TikTok videos (<https://bit.ly/3AgfhTR>) that also ran on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn during the month of May, as well as our Simply Well blog (<https://bit.ly/3Q7AIhH>).

Curious about any other myths you've heard? Our ophthalmologists and optometrists can always answer any burning questions you might have. Or be sure to ask at your next eye exam!



# UMASS INSIGHT

News from the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences

## GRADUATION: CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR INAUGURAL CLASS OF RESIDENTS

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Dr. Vincent is a clinician-scientist working in the field of inherited retinal disorders and electrophysiology. His primary research interest is to identify novel genes in retinal dystrophies and understand underlying disease mechanisms. Dr. Vincent is the Medical Director of the Visual Electrophysiology Unit and is actively involved in teaching ophthalmology residents and fellows in the resident and fellowship training program at SickKids, The Hospital for Sick Children, in Toronto, Canada. He is also an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto, Canada.

To close out the day, residents were invited to partake in a few activities before being treated to lunch with their guests and faculty. Our program culminated with the long-awaited formal graduation of our beloved residents.

Congratulations to everyone who helped make this day possible from the program's vision and inception to the past three years of constant transformations, evolutions, teaching and learning! Cheers to our graduates! We wish you well. You will always be special members of our eye team family.

*Best Wishes Soraiya and Saad  
from your eye team family*



*Three cheers for the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at UMass Memorial Health and UMass Chan Medical School! Members of our faculty and staff joyously joined together to celebrate the graduation of our inaugural class of Ophthalmology residents.*



UMASS MEMORIAL  
**EYE CENTER**

## VIRTUAL EYE HOSPITAL

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empower students to build confidence in their skills and enable them to provide the best outcome for every patient, every time. Simulation-based learning using virtual reality, hands-on training and a video component is an effective way for medical students to improve levels of knowledge, skills, and attitude regarding anatomy, physical diagnosis techniques, and clinical correlations. This simulated learning approach can be adapted to other skill training necessary for residency, fellowship and practice readiness. Utilizing this cutting-edge technology is a steppingstone for developing different teaching methods, including a virtual classroom as our future in medical education. Educational research evaluating and developing effective teaching modules are underway.

We are excited about the opportunity that the Virtual Eye Hospital presents for our faculty and students and are proud to continue to provide excellent education to current and future health care providers.

Find us online for the latest, research, publications, faculty updates & more at [www.umassmed.edu/ophthalmology](http://www.umassmed.edu/ophthalmology)

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