

# UMASS INSIGHT



*News from the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences*



UMASS MEMORIAL  
**EYE CENTER**

Winter 2022



## INSIGHT FROM THE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF AMBULATORY SERVICES

Dear valued colleagues,

After being away from UMass Memorial Health for 7 years, I am excited to be back at UMass Memorial Medical Center. It's hard to believe it's been almost two years. While I spent much of the first year addressing the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, I have now turned my attention to the ongoing journey of improving patient access and the patient experience.

I am proud of what the Department of Ophthalmology has accomplished to ensure patients have convenient access to the eye and vision care they need. With the addition of evening hours and expanded clinic space, Ophthalmology is leading the way in rethinking how we deliver care to our patients. And, as a result of your hard work, you are exceeding volume goals month over month, year over year!

When it comes to patient access, the number one goal of our health care system is to get patients to the right provider for the right reasons at the right time. As with many health care systems, getting appointments for specialty care can be a challenge. UMass Memorial Health Ambulatory Care is following the lead of other academic health care organizations, like Mayo Clinic and Stanford, with the launch of a new Patient Access Center (PAC) that transforms the patient scheduling process.

On October 26, the first Medical Center-based clinics went live in the PAC: Diabetes, Diabetes Education, Endocrinology, Lung and Allergy, Nephrology, and Rheumatology. Our goal is to create an infrastructure that allows for appointment inquiries to be resolved in a timely manner. The biggest change is that scheduling teams will now include nurses who will aid in resolving complex scheduling questions.

I am excited that Ophthalmology will be part of the Patient Access Center's Phase 2 roll out and look forward to working with you to improve access to the outstanding vision and eye services you provide.



We've created a short video to help everyone "get to know the new Patient Access Center." See what we are so excited about by visiting <https://bit.ly/GetToKnowPAC> or scan the QR code on the left.

Happy Holidays!!!

**Dianna Caffarena, MBA**

Senior Vice President, Ambulatory  
UMass Memorial Medical Center

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## CHAIR INSIGHT: MILESTONES AND MEMORIES – THE FIVE-YEAR GIFT

The last two years went by in a flash! I could blame it on the pandemic, but the fact is, the older we get, the faster time flies. This is already our 11th issue of our “UMass Insight” newsletter. That’s incredible to me. Two issues per year for the last five years and now we’re onto number 11 as we enter our sixth year together. What a wonderful milestone!

Last month, our Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences underwent our five-year review. You’ll read more about how it went later in our newsletter. But I do want to share a bit about the process and what we’ve been up to over the past five years. Every five years, each department within our health care system is subject to a full review by outside parties who look at our accomplishments, progress, and even where we might need to improve. I welcome this sort of review because, first, I’m thrilled to talk about our fantastic department and people any chance I get. And second, because I want to keep improving. We are constantly learning and evolving. So, the opportunity to receive candid feedback from ophthalmology peers from highly regarded institutions across the country is an amazing gift.

Preparing for this type of review is a tremendous amount of work. But at the same time, it gives us a chance to look back on all of our achievements over the past five years and reflect



on where we’ve been and how far we’ve come. We can think about how many new faces have joined our team, how many new patients have joined our family, how our clinics have changed and improved, and of course, what our plans are for the future. Our department has grown exponentially in five years. We began extended-hours clinics, open from 7 am to 6 pm, at our UMass Memorial Medical Center – Hahnemann Campus and Northborough Crossing clinics. And, we’re just coming off our best year ever for patient volume.

As we look ahead, we’re very excited as we prepare to open a brand-new clinic just downstairs from our current clinic in Northborough. This beautiful space was

designed specifically for us, it features the latest technology, it offers better access to care for our patients, and it provides an additional training site for our residents. We can’t wait to have you visit!

Just as our five-year review allowed us a time to look back at all we’ve achieved and can be proud of, the holiday season upon us presents a wonderful opportunity to take time to celebrate our achievements and focus on the future. Happy Holidays!

**Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM**  
*Professor and Department Chair*

## EYE TEAM MEMBERS ENJOY DAY OF EMPOWERMENT

On October 28, members of the UMass Memorial Eye Center attended the Worcester Women’s Leadership Conference held by the Worcester Chamber of Commerce. UMass Memorial serves as one of the lead sponsors of this incredible, inspirational day, which feeds the hearts and souls of our women leaders, and encourages them to learn, develop, and grow.

During the event, attendees were invited to participate in a workshop session led by **Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM**, and her team of past and current women chairs from the Medical Group. The panel’s discussion highlighted the efforts they made to address the inequities of caregivers during the pandemic. Pictured left to right, **Kim Yonkers, MD**, **Dr. Schaal**, **Tiffany Moore Simas, MD, MPH, MEd**, **Diane McKee, MD**, and **Mary Maloney, MD**.



## STAFF INSIGHT

### LYNN KONIECZNY, CERTIFIED OPHTHALMIC TECHNICIAN

Lynn joined the UMass Memorial Eye Center last year bringing her many years of experience to our very strong team of technicians. She has enjoyed a career in the ophthalmology field since 1998 and is also a certified dispensing optician. Lynn thrives on the pace of the work here, values the continual improvements in technology that the field has experienced, and very much enjoys the connection she has with our patients. "My favorite part of being a technician is caring for my patients. There is a personal reward knowing that I am helping them see as well as they can see, but I also take pride in ensuring they have a positive experience by making them feel welcome and comfortable while they are here," said Lynn.

Outside of work Lynn has many hobbies. She enjoys reading medical literature to expand her knowledge on relevant ophthalmology topics, but also appreciates other types of reading for fun. She loves spending time at the beach or a park, and greatly cherishes spending quality time with her two grandchildren and her mother, when her busy schedule allows.



## DEPARTMENT SHINES AT FIVE-YEAR REVIEW

Last November, our department underwent a comprehensive five-year review process. This process provided us with the opportunity to reflect on the significant work done and successes achieved during that time period. Our self-study entitled, **"The Transformation of the Eye Center – A Five-Year Success Story,"** penned by **Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM**, President, UMass Memorial Medical Group, and Chair, Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, in collaboration with many members of the department, is a testament to the deep pride and immense satisfaction felt as we looked back at our body of work.

The five-year review report focuses on the department's missions, including clinical, research, educational and community outreach. Each section of the report details the numerous projects, results and recognitions achieved as a result of the team's commitment in each area.

"This was a very important milestone for our department. These reviews serve to reinforce how deserving a department is of further investments from both the health care system and from the Medical School, so we may continue to develop and build upon the excellent work we are already doing," said Dr. Shlomit Schaal.

The department received complimentary feedback from the review team who expressed their utmost respect and admiration, and articulated how impressed they were with all of the department's achievements. Special thanks are extended to review team members: Donald M. Miller, MD, Assistant Professor of Surgery, Geisel School of Medicine, Dartmouth; Cynthia Ann Toth, MD, Professor of Ophthalmology, Joseph A.C. Wadsworth Distinguished, Professor of Ophthalmology, Professor of Biomedical Engineering, Duke Eye Center; and Michael E. Zegans, MD, Professor of Surgery, Professor of Microbiology and Immunology Section Chief, Ophthalmology, Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center.

"I'm very pleased with our showcase of amazing work and I commit to following up on all reviewers' recommendations to assure our department is best positioned for the future," said Dr. Schaal. "From the bottom of my heart, I thank everyone involved for their contributions! I'm so very proud to be a member of our stellar Eye Team."

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## FACULTY INSIGHT

**KAREN JENG-MILLER, MD, MPH**  
**ASSISTANT PROFESSOR**

**Karen Jeng-Miller, MD, MPH**, joined the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences in the summer of 2021. She is delighted to be able to serve the greater Worcester area and collaborate with her incredible colleagues at the Eye Center.

Dr. Jeng-Miller graduated from Princeton University with an AB in chemistry and certificates in engineering biology, materials science and engineering, and Spanish language and culture. She obtained an MPH in International Health at Boston



University School of Public Health, where she was inducted into the Delta Omega Honorary Society in Public Health. She earned her medical degree at Rutgers-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, where she was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha Medical Honor Society for exceptional academic performance. Following

medical school, she completed her residency in ophthalmology at Mass Eye and Ear, which consistently ranks among the top five eye institutes nationwide. She then completed a two-year fellowship in Vitreoretinal Surgery at Ophthalmic Consultants of Boston and Tufts-New England Eye Center, which are among the leading retina clinical trials and research centers in the country, respectively.

Dr. Jeng-Miller is excited to have joined the UMass Memorial Eye Team and looks forward to providing pediatric and adult retina care to the community. She is also very enthusiastic about mentoring and teaching new generations of ophthalmologists through the residency program.

## AN EYE ON RESEARCH

**EMMA WOOD**  
**RESEARCH COORDINATOR**

**Emma Wood**, Research Coordinator, Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, joined the UMass Memorial Eye Center in June 2021. She is excited to help further the Eye Team's innovative and rapidly growing research operations.

Emma recently graduated from the College of the Holy Cross where she studied psychology and neuroscience. During her undergraduate career, she conducted research in health psychology and developmental neurobiology, which inspired an awareness of and interest in ophthalmology. She is a Massachusetts native and is happy to call Worcester home.

Working under **Juan Ding, OD, PhD**, Emma has been collaborating with Family Medicine and Community Health to implement the use of handheld retinal cameras in family medicine clinics to screen for diabetic retinopathy using artificial intelligence. By screening for diabetic retinopathy in primary care clinics, we can reach vulnerable patients who might otherwise miss their yearly screenings. In addition, Emma works with **Haijiang Lin, MD, PhD**, on clinical trials investigating age-related macular degeneration and is actively collaborating with investigators to enhance the Eye Center's clinical trial capabilities that provide patients with access to novel and innovative treatment options.



One of the aspects of her role that she most enjoys is generating interest in ophthalmology at UMass Chan Medical School by connecting medical students with investigators and facilitating events to encourage student research involvement. Recently, Emma worked with the department to coordinate a Research Open House for students at UMass Chan and across the country. She looks forward to uniting with faculty, residents, and the Ophthalmology Student Interest Group on future projects and events.

## COMMUNITY INSIGHT

### SETTING OUR SIGHTS ON PATIENT FEEDBACK AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Here at UMass Memorial Eye Center, we do our best to meet our patients' needs quickly and effectively. We offer a wide variety of specialized services to treat most eye conditions and diseases and always aim to schedule appointments within two weeks. Beginning in March 2021, UMass Memorial Health began surveying patients to get feedback on their experiences. Upon receiving this input, the Ophthalmology team immediately went to work with the goal of using what were predominantly positive comments to create an even better patient experience.

Since we have a departmental meeting every week that focuses on process improvement, we decided to use one meeting each month to discuss patient input and address items that the team found less than perfect or in need of a new approach. By staying current with patient comments and discussing solutions as a team, we were able to identify and resolve patient experience challenges with efficiency and effectiveness. Several of those solutions include:

- Improved signage within the department to point patients more easily toward the checkout area
- New signage to alert patients if a doctor is running behind so that they may adjust their plans if necessary
- Communicating to patients at scheduling what they should expect in terms of total visit time and what to bring with them for the best possible experience

In addition, we are currently working on ways to improve the experiences of our elderly/mobility-impaired patients.

Below are some comments from our most recent survey which are points of pride for the entire team of Ophthalmology caregivers, including front desk and technicians:

*"First time meeting Dr. Luna. It was great. Very informative, kind and engaging. A great listener. I didn't feel rushed at all. I would highly recommend him. In fact, I've already recommended him to my husband."*

*"The doctor and specialists were all very attentive ... Everything went very well."*

The team looks forward to these monthly huddles as a way to ensure we are constantly listening to our patients and looking for ways to improve their experience. With this work, we are confident our patients will see that they are the Department of Ophthalmology's primary focus.

### CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FOLLOWING TECHNICIANS WHO HAVE PASSED THE FOLLOWING CERTIFICATION EXAMS IN RECENT MONTHS

- Certified Ophthalmic Technician: **David Rivera**
- Certified Ophthalmic Assistant: **Cassondra Marcy**
- Certified Ophthalmic Assistant: **Nicholas Mastrodomenico**
- Certified Ophthalmic Assistant: **Kara Donnelly**

We celebrate the achievement of each of these valued team members as they become certified in their professions.

Congratulations

**Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM**  
for being named to the list of

### THE 100 TOP WOMEN LEADERS IN MEDICINE OF 2021

by Women We Admire  
Guiding healthcare delivery, leading  
changes and enhancing policy  
improvements nationwide.

Thank you for your dedication.

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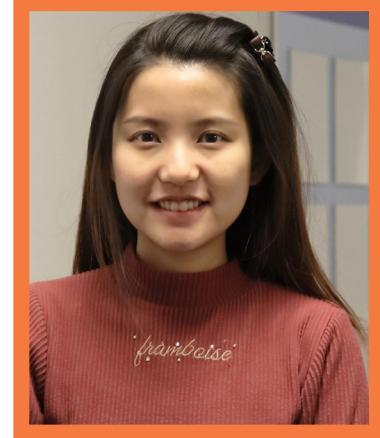
## RESEARCH INSIGHT: DOCTORAL CANDIDATE MICHELLE CHENG'S RESEARCH OFFERS HOPE FOR AMD PATIENTS

**Michelle Cheng** is a PhD student in the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the UMass Chan Medical School and completed her doctoral dissertation in November. As a doctoral candidate, she combined her early academic interests in neuroscience and molecular biology through her research study on age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss in the elderly of the industrialized world. The disease is caused by multiple genetic and environmental risk factors, however, what causes AMD remains unknown. It has therefore proven difficult to develop a therapy for the disease and Michelle has been motivated to learn more.

As an undergraduate at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, Michelle studied neuroscience and molecular biology, continuing her studies to earn a master's degree in molecular biology, with a focus on chromosome segregation during meiosis. Michelle was subsequently welcomed into the PhD program at UMass Chan in 2015 and a year later began her thesis project in the laboratory of **Claudio Punzo, PhD**, an associate professor and principal investigator in the Ophthalmology department. Her work in the Punzo lab has centered around the idea that photoreceptors are responsible for the onset of AMD.

After analyzing photoreceptors in human tissue samples, she mimicked what she saw in a mouse model – the first animal model that develops all characteristic features of AMD, including the choroidal neovascular pathology and geographic atrophy. Her work has thus laid the foundation for the development of new therapeutic approaches. Michelle is now collaborating with the RNA Therapeutics Institute at UMass Chan as part of her postdoctoral studies to develop a therapy that prevents disease progression.



## THERE MUST BE SOMETHING IN THE WATER!



"Gabriel Santo Gonzalez was born on December 2, 2021. He was born 7 lbs., 4 oz. and 19.25 inches tall. Mom and new baby are doing amazing." **Christina Cartagena**



"Here is my little pumpkin, Mara Miller, born November 4. She loves milk, sleeping and cuddles." **Karen Jeng-Miller, MD, MPH**



"Benjamin Wyatt Bonaldi was born August 22. Ben is a very happy baby and smiling is his favorite. He is known for his full head of hair!" **Ana Bonaldi, OD**



"Justin Ding was born December 31, 2020. Fun fact about him: he's walking independently at 10 months, however, still sleeping like a 3-month-old!" **Juan Ding, OD, PhD**

## RESIDENT INSIGHT: LAUREN COLWELL, MD, AND LUKE NAMAN, MD (PGY-1)

“Welcome,” **Misha Faustina, MD**, said in the warm July air as **Lauren Colwell, MD**, and **Luke Naman, MD**, pulled on recently pressed white coats. They were meeting each other for the first time since agreeing to train at the UMass Eye Center in January 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. They were selected for their ability to create and

innovate as our department grows. Currently, Dr. Colwell is working on a project to improve fortified antibiotics for our patients. Dr. Naman has been developing medical student education, including organizing a slit lamp workshop for interested medical students.

Dr. Colwell and Dr. Naman began their clinical duties with the support of all the residents, faculty and clinic staff from buddy call to daily morning report. The clinic buzzes with excitement and learning.

Dr. Colwell’s favorite part of her day to day is the people. “Nothing compares to the UMass Eye Team. We are hardy and happy. Each day, I am faced with challenges as a trainee, such as a new disease that I have not seen or being on call while caring for patients in the clinic. I am only able to do this because of the dedicated faculty who support, guide and educate.”

Dr. Naman’s favorite part of his day is the patients. “I love having the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with patients and participate in their longitudinal care. Long days on call can be exhausting, but I find the stresses of my life fading from my mind’s eye when I’m talking with patients. I feel like I’m finally becoming a real doctor!”

Welcome Dr. Colwell and Dr. Naman to the Eye Team!



## EYE CENTER TEAM IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

The pavilion at Polar Park was filled with nothing but joy, happiness and laughter when the Eye Center Team gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of the past five years. It was indeed a beautiful sight to see after two long and tedious years, and the blue, sunny skies over the field offered hope for the future.

Dr. Schaal expressed her appreciation for the Eye Center Team that has created and sustained a culture of positivity, helpfulness, inclusivity, joy and love, even during

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## DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY & VISUAL SCIENCES 2021 AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

### Award of Excellence for Superb Clinical Service:

- Ann Fahey
- Lynn Konieczny
- Jessica Peterson

### Award of Excellence for Superb Administrational Service:

- Anita Amin
- Maria Leitao-Pina, MBA
- Katherine Ribeiro, MBA

### Award of Excellence for Superb Extended Eye Team Family:

- Themia Pappas-Fillmore
- Crystal Reardon
- Dominika Schmid

### Award for Outstanding Idea Board Leadership:

- 1st - Sherri Granger
- 2nd - Katherine Ribeiro, MBA
- 3rd - Manisha Anand, MBA

### Role Model Award

- Sharon Furbish
- Jackie Volke

### Top Women Leaders in Medicine Award

- Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL Awardees**



### Eye Team Members Honored for 'Hitting it Outta the Park'

A huge shoutout to our 2021 Excellence Award Winners whose dedication to our team is so appreciated. We are a better place because of you. Thank you for your imagination!



UMASS MEMORIAL  
**EYE CENTER**

### EYE CENTER TEAM IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

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the most difficult of times. Members of the team were recognized for certain achievements, but as Dr. Schaal clearly noted, they are a team and its success is only possible because of the dedication of all Eye Center colleagues, including those who work behind the scenes to ensure things run smoothly.

Reassurance, compassion, consistency, determination, quick thinking, and ability to adapt were some of the many words that resonated with Katherine Ribeiro, manager of the Eye Center, when she spoke passionately about her colleagues and what makes the Eye Center the place "you want to work, a place you want to be."

This is a team that collectively recognizes how fortunate they are to work alongside each other, making each other better, while being committed to making a difference in the quality of the daily lives of each patient.

*Happy Holidays!*