

# UMASS INSIGHT



UMASS MEMORIAL  
**EYE CENTER**

*News from the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences*

**Winter 2023**

## INSIGHT FROM SENIOR DIRECTOR, AMBULATORY SERVICES

Seven years ago, I was given the opportunity to have oversight responsibilities of the Ophthalmology Clinic. At the same time, the search for a new department chair was underway and the clinic manager was transitioning to retirement. While there was a level of uncertainty among the physicians and caregivers, it was time for a change, a new beginning that would eventually be embraced by the team.

**Dr. Schaal** was appointed the department chair and a new manager was hired. Dr. Schaal shared her vision for the future, and immediately engaged the faculty and caregivers to become the Best Eye Center in Central Massachusetts. We recognized that to be the best place to give care and the best place to get care, we needed to collaborate with departments across the system to assist us on this journey. We had many willing partners, including Marketing and Communications, Information Services and Human Resources, to name a few.

Over the next several years, the clinic began to transform. Physicians with subspecialties were recruited, ophthalmic technicians and ambulatory service representatives joined the team, new imaging equipment was acquired, and clinic space was redesigned by the team to improve the patient and physician experience. Other significant accomplishments included our agreement with Boston Children's Hospital to provide both ambulatory and surgical services for our pediatric population; the development and implementation of the residency program; and more recently the expansion of the Eye Center in Northborough.

I have been so inspired by the Eye Center for their constant dedication to improve and grow, as well as their team spirit and support of one another and to our patients. The Eye Center's recent recognition as the Best Eye Center in Central Massachusetts demonstrates all their hard work has not gone unnoticed.

To quote Charles S. Lauer, "Leaders don't force people to follow, they invite them on a journey." I know that the journey is far from over for the Eye Center. I look forward to where we will continue to go in the years ahead.

With gratitude to Dr. Schaal and the entire Eye Center team,

**Christine Vallee**

Senior Director, Ambulatory Operations  
UMass Memorial Medical Center

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Assistant Professor

Benjamin Botsford, MD  
Assistant Professor

### RESEARCH

Darren J. Lee, PhD  
Principal Investigator and  
Associate Professor

### STAFF

April Carlson  
Registered Nurse,  
Ophthalmology

### RESIDENT

Derek Metcalfe, MD  
Resident PGY-2

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**UMass Memorial** Health  
UMASS MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER



**UMass Chan**  
MEDICAL SCHOOL

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## CHAIR INSIGHT: FAREWELL UMASS FAMILY

This is my last UMass Chair InSight article, as I have accepted the opportunity to become President and CEO of the Houston Methodist Physician Organization and the new Executive Vice President and Chief Physician Executive at Houston Methodist in Texas. I shall be leaving UMass in April 2023. It has been an absolute pleasure and honor to serve our organizations in multiple leadership roles. First and foremost, I took much pride and pleasure in serving as the Chair of the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences over the last six-and-a-half years.

To see this department evolve, grow, and thrive over that period of time was incredibly rewarding and fulfilling. I have so much appreciation and admiration to all of the people in the Eye Center who contributed with their knowledge, skills and talents to make this department so successful. In the past year alone, we have achieved three major milestones that I am very proud of.

1. We opened a brand-new clinic at Northborough Crossing. Very quickly this clinic became extremely successful with high productivity and high patient-satisfaction rates and is a great source of joy and pride for our team.
2. We graduated the first class of ophthalmology residents from UMass. This is a momentous achievement that took the commitment and dedication of so many, faculty and staff alike.
3. Perhaps, most rewarding of all, we were named as the Best Eye Clinic in



**“HOW LUCKY I AM TO HAVE SOMETHING THAT MAKES SAYING GOODBYE SO HARD.”  
- WINNIE THE POOH**

all of Central Massachusetts by the Telegram & Gazette in 2022. This is meaningful and significant award because it is received according to our patients' votes.

In the past two years, I have also served as the Senior Advisor to the Dean for Health Strategies and as the President of our Medical Group. In these roles, I had the priceless opportunity to make a difference and impact so many physicians, faculty members, and caregivers. I had the chance to lead several initiatives that focused on improving caregiver engagement, enhancing professional development for physicians and leaders, improving access to patient care, and increasing diversity in our organizations. In these leadership roles, I was tremendously inspired by the

innovative work that is performed across our system in all departments. This has given me an opportunity to get to know other departments, divisions and caregivers outside of the Eye Center.

All who know me, know that I am a champion of change. I enjoy progress and I embrace challenges. I appreciate that not everyone is like me, and many would prefer constancy. However, being true to my passion, I have decided to embrace a new leadership opportunity that will challenge me and require me to adapt to many changes. I have absolutely no doubt that the many things I've learned from all of the wonderful people I've worked so closely with at UMass Memorial and UMass Chan will serve me well in the future and will help me make a difference at Houston Methodist.

I'm so pleased to share that I will be leaving you in the best of hands with Dr. Johanna Seddon assuming the role of Interim Chair of our department upon my departure. Dr. Seddon is a highly respected, world-renowned physician-scientist who brings outstanding expertise in both the clinical and research spaces. I am certain she will be an excellent leader for this department, which I hold so dear.

I loved my time here at UMass. It was unforgettable. Above all, I love the people I worked with. It was so much fun! I thank you for your support and friendship. Please keep in touch.

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

## FACULTY INSIGHT

### ELVISA LOSHE, MD, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

**Elvisa Loshe, MD**, joined the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences and the UMass Memorial Eye Center this past summer after serving in private practice in Worcester. She is delighted to continue caring for patients in the Worcester community, specializing in cataract surgery and Minimally Invasive Glaucoma Surgery (MIGS). As a member of the UMass Chan Medical School faculty, she also enjoys mentoring and training the next generation of ophthalmologists.



Dr. Loshe graduated from the University of Toronto with a bachelor's degree in life sciences, biology and Italian language/literature. She went on to a career in marketing and banking; however, her longstanding passion for medicine led her to later obtain her medical degree from Lewis Katz School of Medicine at

Temple University in Philadelphia. There she was inducted into the prestigious Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) Honor Medical Society. Following medical school, she completed an ophthalmology residency at Detroit's Kresge Eye Institute.

When asked what she enjoys most as an ophthalmologist she said, "My ability to make a difference in a patient's quality of life. It's most satisfying when I pull back the surgical drape after removing an advanced cataract in almost blind patients and hear them say, 'Doc, I can already see,' and see the big smile on their face."

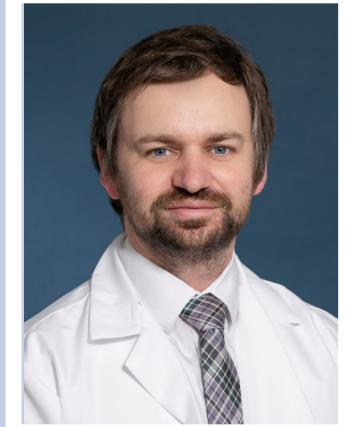
Congratulations to Dr. Loshe for recently earning her Ophthalmology board certification!

## FACULTY INSIGHT

### BENJAMIN BOTSFORD, MD, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Born and raised in Rhode Island, **Benjamin Botsford, MD**, recently joined the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences in the summer 2022. He is delighted to serve the ophthalmology needs of a diverse patient population and collaborate with his UMass Memorial Eye Center colleagues. Dr. Botsford is beloved by all — faculty, staff and patients — and since joining he has become one of the department's most popular providers.

After graduating from New York University with a degree in neuroscience, he went on to receive his medical degree from Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston. He completed an ophthalmology residency at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and was recently a vitreoretinal fellow at NY Presbyterian-Weill Cornell Medical Center. He has published over 20 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters and presented at numerous regional and national conferences.



In his short time here, he has gone above and beyond to support community outreach initiatives. He volunteered at a diabetes outreach clinic for Veterans Inc. in Worcester where he performed ophthalmology screenings for veterans and their families. He also presented on "Diabetes and Your Eyes" for the UMass Memorial Eye Center's inaugural "See Better! Live Fuller!" patient webinar series this past fall.

With a special interest in retinal disease and macular degeneration, Dr. Botsford looks forward to providing medical and surgical care to the community, as well as teaching the enthusiastic and stellar ophthalmology residents at the Hahnemann and Northborough offices.

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## RESEARCH INSIGHT: EXPLORING NEW TREATMENTS FOR PATIENTS WITH UVEITIS

### DARREN J. LEE, PHD, PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

Uveitis is inflammation of the eye and the third cause of blindness in the United States. This condition can occur when your immune system is fighting an eye infection, but it can also happen when your immune system attacks healthy tissue in your eyes. The standard of care for this disease is to reduce the inflammation with corticosteroids or other medications that suppress the immune response. Patients can be on immunosuppressive therapies for decades until remission from uveitis is achieved and then medications can be slowly tapered to prevent relapse. During this treatment

period the patient is highly susceptible to infections. Also, while corticosteroids are potent at suppressing the immune system, they cause a wide range of undesirable side effects, such as decreasing bone density, weight gain, diabetes, gastrointestinal ulcers, and can be severely mood altering. Rather than using this treatment approach, a more targeted approach that protects ocular tissue from inflammation would potentially be more effective and have fewer side effects. **Dr. Lee's** research is focused on mechanisms that promote the induction of regulatory T cells (Tregs), a type of immune cell capable of suppressing uveitis and providing resistance to relapsing uveitis. Utilizing a mouse model of autoimmune uveitis, Dr. Lee has identified a pathway that is needed for the induction of Tregs and is now further exploring new pathways that offer potential new treatments for uveitis.



Dr. Lee received a bachelor's degree in genetics from the University of California, Davis. After obtaining his doctorate in genetics from the University of New Hampshire, he completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Schepens Eye Research Institute and Harvard

Medical School with Dr. Andrew Taylor and later moved with the Taylor Lab to Boston University School of Medicine. In 2015, Dr. Lee launched his own independent research program at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences. We are pleased to have recently welcomed Dr. Lee back to Massachusetts in July 2022, when he brought his innovative research program to the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences at the UMass Chan Medical School.

For more information about Dr. Lee's Research: <https://www.umassmed.edu/darrenleelab>

## SEE BETTER! LIVE FULLER! PATIENT EDUCATION SERIES

This fall we launched our first ever UMass Memorial Eye Center virtual patient education series, See Better! Live Fuller!, featuring **Dr. Misha Faustina, Dr. Gabriel Luna and Dr. Benjamin Botsford**. More than 350 individuals participated in the three sessions on topics that included Diabetes and Your Eyes, What's that Bump on Your Eyelid and Cataracts. This program demonstrates the Eye Center team's dedication not only to their patients, but also to the greater community who benefited from the information. Attendees commented on how presenters took very complex subjects and presented in clear, concise and easy-to-understand formats.

These presentations are available on demand [www.ummhealth.org/eye-center](http://www.ummhealth.org/eye-center). We hope to offer this program in the spring.



## STAFF INSIGHT

### APRIL CARLSON REGISTERED NURSE, OPHTHALMOLOGY

April Carlson started her nursing career 26 years ago and joined the UMass Memorial family in 2007. While she is a newcomer to the UMass Memorial Eye Center, she has spent the last 15 years in the Emergency Department at the University Campus, so is no stranger to UMass Memorial. She appreciates that UMass Memorial afforded her many rewarding and challenging experiences with the security and flexibility to raise her three children. Now that her children are grown, she was ready to move on to something new and is blazing

new trails as the first registered nurse within the Eye Center.

“The Eye Center welcomed me with open arms. Starting a new career path is never easy but the staff’s kindness, eagerness to help and respectfulness has made my first few months here tension-free,” said April.

She is excited to leverage her past experiences to

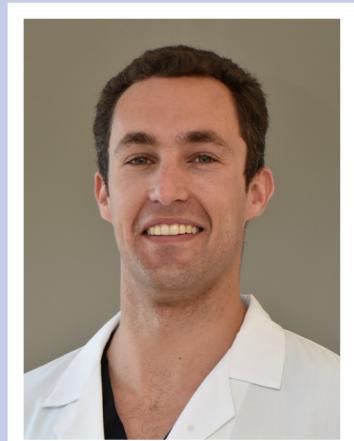
create a pathway as a nurse in the Eye Center. In just a short time she has witnessed the camaraderie of the team, how the staff members support each other and is proud to call this her new ‘place of work.’ Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family and her two new rescue puppies named Harley (20 months) and Max (8 months). Now that the puppies passed training school, she’s planning to spend more time with her 1-year-old granddaughter Paisley and attend her son’s baseball games at Fisher College where he plays catcher. The Eye Center is pleased to welcome April to the team.



## RESIDENT INSIGHT

### DEREK METCALFE, MD, PGY-2 OPHTHALMOLOGY RESIDENT

Derek Metcalfe, MD, a second-year resident, has stayed true to his roots in Massachusetts, completing his undergraduate and medical degrees at Tufts University, and ultimately landing at UMass Memorial. Although Derek’s dream was to play hockey in the NHL, a 9th grade biology project on LASIK surgery, a life-changing procedure, piqued his interest and ultimately drew him to the field of ophthalmology. He had the good fortune of also working as a technician at Parelli Optical in Somerville, and as a research fellow in the Cornea Department at Massachusetts Eye and Ear. There he focused on the ocular manifestations and management of Stevens-Johnson Syndrome and Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis, before finding his way to UMass Memorial for internship and residency.



“I have been grateful for my experience at UMass Memorial Eye Center. Within the first five months, I was granted the opportunity to perform entire oculoplastic surgeries, laser procedures, and over 200 intravitreal injections, a unique benefit of our program relative to others,” said Derek. As a participant in the integrated internship, he was pleased to work with many different consulting services, which revealed to him how important teamwork is to the success of a hospital unit. And beyond that, he sees how hard everyone works – from the front desk staff to coordinators, technicians, residents and attendings – and acknowledges it’s contagious as he strives to emulate this in his work every day.

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## EYE CENTER WINS FIRST PLACE IN EYE CARE IN BEST OF CENTRAL MASS 2022



**The UMass Memorial Eye Center was recently voted the best place to receive eye care in Central Massachusetts.**

The “Best of Central Massachusetts” awards, sponsored by the Worcester Telegram & Gazette, polled readers on which area businesses and services meet their needs best. 2022 was the first year that the UMass Memorial Eye Center was nominated and awarded this affirming accolade.

Leaders within the Eye Center attribute this win to the hard work of its employees, the quality care provided and the fact that in 2021-2022 it leveraged monthly patient experience huddles to review input from Press Ganey patient surveys. “Any area that caused them dissatisfaction was discussed so that we could better meet their needs, become more efficient or communicate with them better,” said **Katherine Ribeiro, MBA**, Manager, Ambulatory Operations, Ophthalmology.

The Eye Center team is grateful for the patients who entrust UMass Memorial with their care.

“It is undeniable, that our patients took notice and that we surpassed all other eye clinics in our area for delivering the best patient care to them,” said **Shlomit Schaal, MD, PhD, MHCM**, Professor and Chair of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at UMass Memorial Health and UMass Chan Medical School, and President, UMass Memorial Medical Group. “I am so proud of every single member of our team who made this happen.”

The Eye Center is in very good company with several other top-notch clinics at UMass Memorial Health that also won first place in their areas of expertise: Cardiology, Plastic Surgery, Dermatology, Emergency, Maternity and Childbirth, Women’s Health, and UMass Memorial Medical Center as Best Hospital in Central Mass.

Congratulations to all the winners!

## EYE TEAM FAMILY FUN DAY - CELEBRATING OUR PEOPLE



On Sunday, September 18, UMass Memorial Eye Center employees and their families gathered for its annual Family Fun Day at Dean Park in Shrewsbury. Significant others, children, babies and even our fur babies were present for this potluck offering. So many delicious treats were enjoyed by all, including some beautifully decorated UMass Memorial Eye Center-branded cupcakes with orange and blue accents.

**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, couldn't have ordered up any better weather for this opportunity to gather and connect with co-workers outside of work. "It's very important that I share my gratitude with the team who takes such good care of our patients as well as each other," said Dr. Schaal. "Being able to mingle and chat outside of work also creates a unique and different connection than we are able to have in the clinic."

This is just one more example of how Dr. Schaal's leadership has led to the positive camaraderie and team spirit within the UMass Memorial Eye Center.



## EYE CENTER TEAM LEAVES NO PIN STANDING AT HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

The UMass Memorial Eye Center team gathered Friday, December 16, for its annual holiday celebration at Apex Entertainment in Marlborough. A bit different than in past years, by popular demand the team chose to go bowling. Bringing the team together outside of work is an important way **Dr. Shlomit Schaal** acknowledges and shows appreciation for her team.

After indulging in a full spread of pizzas, sliders and a nacho bar, Dr. Schaal presented the 2022 awards for outstanding service in promoting the mission of Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences. Later, more than 50 in attendance took to the lanes. When technician **David Rivera** was asked about his winning night he said, "No child can defeat the Grinch," referencing his loving nickname at the Eye Center. Second and third place went to fourth-year resident **Omar Abdelmegid** and researcher **Michelle Cheng**. Unfortunately, COVID kept some folks away, but a fun night was had by all.



## DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY & VISUAL SCIENCES 2022 AWARDS

### Award for Outstanding Idea Board Leadership:

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

### Award of Excellence:

- Zorangly Baez
- Jodie Grady
- Shalese Harris
- Firas Kassira, OD
- Jason Mctigue
- Kathy Mshooshian
- Lori Murnane

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL Awardees**

*Happy New Year - 2023*

