

Early Career

Christina Y. Weng, MD, MBA
Section Co-chair



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Section Co-chair



Meet the Early Career Section Team

If we've learned anything about the ASRS as the Early Career Section (ECS) co-chairs, it's that it takes a village. In this case, it is a village of dedicated ASRS members, including retina specialists who generously spend nights and weekends working on a plethora of projects, and staff members who tirelessly work behind the scenes to make the Society the phenomenal organization it is today.

The ECS consists of ASRS members in their first 7 years of practice; its creation was spurred by the special needs and interests of this group of retina specialists. In this issue, we feature our enthusiastic ECS Committee members, who share their perspectives as well as details about ongoing projects and upcoming resources that will benefit us all.



Arshad M. Khanani, MD, MA
Managing Partner and
Director of Clinical Research
Sierra Eye Associates
Clinical Associate Professor
University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada

ECS role: International ECS Exchange
Program Director
Years in practice: 7

As the ECS International Exchange Program director, you have facilitated connecting ASRS members from around the globe.

How might these international relationships between retina specialists be mutually beneficial?

Around the world, retina specialists face different challenges and pathologies in their practices. The practice setup, equipment, and patient flow also can differ greatly from one country to another. International relationships can help advance our profession by allowing physicians to learn the best practice patterns and techniques from one another to help our patients.

What observership and mentorship opportunities are available to our international colleagues?

Our visiting international colleagues have a wide variety of opportunities. For example, they can observe retinal surgery in the operating room and patient care in the

clinic, and/or learn about clinical and basic science research.

Observership opportunities are available at US academic centers as well as private practices. We are continuing to identify US members willing to serve as mentors to international colleagues; interested members are encouraged to sign up on the ASRS website at www.asrs.org/observershipprogram.

Can an ASRS ECS member arrange to spend time abroad in an international member's clinic or hospital through this Exchange Program?

Absolutely; we are lucky to have international members who have agreed to serve as mentors. ASRS ECS members who want to spend time internationally are encouraged to contact us; we can connect them with one of our international mentors through this Exchange Program.



Matthew J. Welch, MD
Associated Retina Consultants
Phoenix, Arizona

ECS role: Content Co-director
Years in practice: 5

As the ECS content co-director, you play an important role in curating the

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Arshad M. Khanani, MD, MA

abundant ASRS website resources that are most valuable for the Early Career Section member.

How do you identify what content will benefit a retina specialist at the beginning of his or her career?

To best determine what kind of content young retina specialists will find beneficial, I simply ask them. My involvement with fellowship training provides me ongoing access to the next generation of retina specialists. It is interesting to see how fellows' questions and concerns change from the first to the second year of training as the fellows progress through the experience of job hunting, interviewing, contracting, and eventually preparing for the start of a career.

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—Matthew J. Welch, MD

I also try to stay active in the young retinal community, locally and nationally. The ASRS Annual Meeting provides a great opportunity to meet other young retina specialists from varying practice environments and diverse practice communities, and these interactions offer great insights.

What elements of the website do you personally find helpful?

I think that the ECS Article Series (www.asrs.org/sections/early-career-section/-ecs-resources) is a great bedrock of information on a variety of topics. My hope is that this and the ECS videos (www.asrs.org/ecsvideos) will grow into a more robust source of information for young retina specialists. Beyond the ECS, the relatively recent addition of the Retina Fact Sheets (www.asrs.org/patients/retinal-diseases) has become a favorite of mine. It is a great resource to offer patients and serves as a reliable source of literature on a number of retinal topics. And check out the Retina Career Center at www.asrs.org/careercenter for the latest job listings.

How can ASRS members contribute valuable ECS-relevant website content?

Starting in 2017, the ECS and its committee members have set goals to expand involvement across social media, direct web content, and mentoring. Each of these platforms offers all ASRS members a means to contribute to the ECS. Videos featuring interviews with more-senior members have been developed, and a strong mentoring program has been established.

Beyond these programs, the Early Career Section is continually striving to provide the content ECS members need. We welcome suggestions from all ASRS members looking to help us achieve our section's goals.



Omar S. Punjabi, MD
Charlotte Eye Ear Nose and Throat Associates (CEENTA)
Charlotte, North Carolina

ECS role: Content Co-director
Years in practice: 4.5

As the ECS content co-director, you play an important role in curating the abundant ASRS website resources most valuable for the Early Career Section member.

How do you identify what content will benefit a retina specialist who is at the beginning of his or her career?

Retina specialists early in their careers are constantly adjusting to stressors. They often have to deal with a new location and work environment, learn to operate independently, deal with financial stressors such as buying a home and paying off loans, and learn to handle their own technicians and employees. They may have personal stressors such as getting married, having kids, and caring for aging parents.

There is also pressure associated with building a practice and facing internal and external competition. Learning how to court referring providers is another adjustment. In academics, young retina specialists often must kickstart their careers with research grant applications and adjust to working with residents, fellows, and co-faculty.

The ECS is looking to target resources to address these difficult challenges. We have a large network of retina specialists who have successfully navigated these waters, and we work to glean their insights through interviews at different meetings.

Often, these interviews are high yield and provide valuable resources to young ECS members. Also at retina meetings, we get to interact with fellows, other ECS members, and ASRS members. We try to get direct feedback from them about what resources would be useful to them early on in their career.

'Retina specialists early in their careers are constantly adjusting to stressors.'

—Omar S. Punjabi, MD

Which elements of the website do you personally find helpful?

I find the frequent articles posted by the ECS Committee useful. For instance, there are several articles on business aspects of a retina practice, on navigating early-career challenges and information on getting involved in clinical research. Surgical videos are educational. The ECS Mentorship Program is also a great resource for young retina specialists.

How can ASRS members contribute valuable ECS-relevant website content?

Some avenues involve posting challenging surgical videos, getting involved in the ECS Mentorship Program, participating in educational interviews with ECS board members during meetings, volunteering to speak at ECS meetings and social events at the ASRS Annual Meeting, and contributing information and articles to the ECS website. To submit a surgical retina video, contact lydia.steck@asrs.org. To submit a Spotlight Case, contact chayal.patel@asrs.org.



Mitul Mehta, MD, MS
Assistant Clinical Professor of Vitreoretinal Diseases & Surgery
Gavin Herbert Eye Institute
University of California, Irvine
Irvine, California

ECS role: Mentoring Program Co-director
Years in practice: 3.5

As the ECS Mentoring Program co-director, you have successfully paired over 100 mentors and mentees since the program launched in August 2017.

How does this program work and how does one sign up to participate?

It's easy to sign up. Go to the Early Career Section of the ASRS website and fill out an application at www.asrs.org/ecsmentoringprogram. Christina Weng and I will match mentors with mentees based on what each person is looking for; we will notify you when you have been matched.

Initially, we recommend a phone call for the mentor and mentee to introduce themselves and become acquainted. We will also guide interaction with question prompts throughout the year to facilitate continued exchange. The program is for 1 year, so it is not a long-term commitment unless both sides want to continue contact.

While it is easy to see how a mentoring relationship can be tremendously advantageous for the mentee, most mentors also feel like they benefit—can you comment on this?

I keep hearing from practicing physicians of all types how, after being out of training for a few years, they miss the interaction with young people. Mentors have learned so much the hard way, and they want to pass that knowledge on to someone else, but sometimes the realities of practice are not amenable to that. A mentor-mentee relationship addresses some of these desires and challenges and

'Christina Weng and I will match mentors with mentees based on what each person is looking for ...'

—Mitul Mehta, MD, MS

fosters a mutually fulfilling relationship. The feedback we have received from participating mentors has been extremely positive.

How have your own mentors helped shape your career?

I am very lucky to have had several amazing mentors over the years. ASRS President Mark Humayun, MD, PhD, from the University of Southern California was one of my earliest mentors. He was the first person to make me believe it was possible to do engineering while being a practicing doctor.

In residency, Christopher Riemann, MD, from Cincinnati showed me how amazing the day-to-day practice of retina is. During my fellowship at New York Eye & Ear Infirmary, I was fortunate to have many mentors I still reach out to, including Drs. Ronald Gentile, Vatsal Doshi, Sanjay Kedhar, Alfonso Ponce, Joseph Benevento, and Richard Rosen. And my chairman, Baruch Kuppermann, MD, PhD, was the person who convinced me to go into academia. These relationships were vital in helping me to develop what I hope to be a long, fulfilling career in retina.



Peter A. Karth, MD, MBA
Oregon Eye Consultants
Eugene, Oregon

ECS role: Online Communications
Co-director
Years in practice: 3

As the ECS Online Communications co-director, you engage our membership to interact via various online platforms. What are the benefits of this type of communication?

We want to meet our members where they are. People typically already look at Facebook (FB) several times a day; we want to be there with relevant, interesting, and useful information about retina, both clinical content and input with a broader perspective.

Sure, we all go to journals and seek relevant content, but we think there's a real benefit to having interesting information delivered right to us on the social media outlets we already check. We are excited about the vibrant interactions we have created with the ECS FB page.

Which channels have been most popular and successful for our members and why?

Most of our efforts are focused on FB, the most popular social media platform. Being on FB makes the most sense at this time.

How do you envision online communications and social media evolving as technology advances?

Social media is going to become more and more important as we see traditional media fading. Those who come after us will get more of their information from social media outlets, both curated and free form.



Michelle V. Carle, MD, MMEd, FRCPC
Kaiser Permanente Washington
Seattle, Washington
ECS role: Online Communications
Co-director
Years in practice: 4

As the newest member of our ECS Committee, you have been charged with spearheading the online Retina Atlas. What drew you to join the ECS Committee?

Early practice is an interesting time: you have accumulated a great repertoire of skills, but putting it into practice can be tricky because there is so much more than retina involved. I found the information provided by the ECS very helpful.

'We want to meet our members where they are. ... Most of our efforts are focused on Facebook.'

—Peter A. Karth, MD, MBA

Having just finished my master of medical education degree with a focus on mentorship in surgical training, I wanted to give back to the community. The ECS seemed like a great resource for me, and I want to be a part of that resource for others.

What do you hope to achieve while working on the committee?

The online Retina Atlas will be a tremendous and living resource for all retina specialists and learners. I'm hoping to encourage ECS, and all ASRS members, to participate, and I will facilitate that participation. It's a huge undertaking spearheaded by ASRS Past President Suber Huang, MD, MBA.

'The online Retina Atlas will be a tremendous and living resource for all retina specialists and learners.'

—Michelle V. Carle,
MD, MMEd, FRCPC

I think the online Retina Atlas is something both world-class experts and general retina folk can really get involved in and learn from as we go deeper into disease classification and identification. This atlas can facilitate your learning of an assigned topic, and can be a great resource in practice.

What advice do you have for ECS members who would like to get more involved?

All it takes is the willingness to commit and an email to the committee, and you will find your niche. You don't know what you can do if you don't try. We are all super busy with work and family, but small efforts add up, and there's a community of support for your endeavors. Don't discount yourself.

We hope you enjoyed getting to know our stellar committee members as well as hearing some of the details about the exciting ongoing projects our committee is currently working on to benefit members of our section. As always, we welcome and value your ideas, feedback, and involvement in the ECS. 🌐

Financial Disclosures

Dr. Carle – GENENTECH, INC: Advisory Board, Honoraria.

Dr. Karth – CARL ZEISS MEDITEC: Consultant, Honoraria.

Dr. Khanani – AERPIO THERAPEUTICS: Consultant, Investigator, Grants; ALCON LABORATORIES, INC: Consultant, Investigator, Grants, Honoraria; ALIMERA SCIENCES: Consultant, Honoraria; ALLERGAN, INC: Advisory Board, Consultant, Investigator, Speaker, Grants, Honoraria; DIGISIGHT TECHNOLOGIES INC: Investigator, Grants; GENENTECH, INC: Advisory Board, Consultant, Investigator, Speaker, Grants, Honoraria; NOVARTIS PHARMACEUTICALS CORPORATION: Advisory Board, Consultant, Investigator, Speaker, Honoraria; OPTHOTEC CORPORATION: Investigator, Grants; OPHTHEA LIMITED: Investigator, Grants; SANTEN INC: Consultant, Honoraria; THROMBOGENICS, INC: Advisory Board, Consultant, Investigator, Speaker, Grants, Honoraria.

Dr. Olmos de Koo – ALCON LABORATORIES, INC: Advisory Board, Consultant, Honoraria; SCIENCE-BASED HEALTH: Advisory Board, Honoraria.

Dr. Mehta – ALIMERA SCIENCES: Advisory Board, Equipment (Department or Practice), Honoraria; ALLERGAN, INC: Advisory Board, Honoraria; CARL ZEISS MEDITEC: Investigator, Grants; EYEDAPTIC, LLC: Advisory Board, Founder, Stock, Stock Options; JCYTE: Investigator, Grants.

Dr. Punjabi – None.

Dr. Welch – None.

Dr. Weng – ALIMERA SCIENCES: Advisory Board, Honoraria; ALLERGAN, INC: Consultant, Honoraria.