



Molly Walsh, MD, MPH

Glaucoma Specialist

By the time Molly Walsh, MD, MPH, completed medical school, an internship in general surgery, a residency and a master's in public health, she realized that she wanted to learn more about medical research and how to translate research to patient care. After training at Tulane and the University of Virginia, she and her family moved to Durham where she is completing a glaucoma fellowship. She joins the Eye Center faculty in July as an assistant professor of ophthalmology and will participate in a clinician-researcher program funded by a three-year Institutional Mentored Clinical Scientist Development Award (K12 Grant) from the National Eye Institute (NEI) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Duke Service Chief for Glaucoma Rand Allingham, MD, says he is pleased to have Walsh join the Duke Glaucoma Service faculty. "Dr. Walsh will be joining us in her role as a clinician-scientist funded by the K12 Program. This program supports the development of young clinician-scientists in translational medicine, designed to move new and powerful research to the patient's bedside," he says. "Dr. Walsh has been a very active researcher during her fellowship; she has a very bright career ahead of her."

Basic research conducted in laboratory isolation is often difficult to implement in a clinical setting. The grant allows vision scientists and patient-oriented clinical investigators to conduct research related to all aspects of vision and then bring that research directly to patients in a clinical setting.

The grant will allow Walsh to spend 75 percent of her time doing research and taking classes. At other times, she will see patients at the main campus Eye Center and at the North Durham Office on North Duke Street. The third year of Walsh's grant time will be devoted solely to research and to the publication of her findings.

Walsh is passionate about her research, which will be primarily focused on immunology, specifically, inflammation related to glaucoma. Currently, she is exploring a new approach to the treatment of glaucoma. "Most current treatments for glaucoma are aimed at the front of the eye," explains Walsh. "This research could shift the focus to the rear of the eye, where the optic nerve and retina are located."

She and her fellow researchers will tag macrophages that originate in bone marrow. "In rodent models with induced glaucoma, we will evaluate the presence and activity of the macrophages in the optic nerve and retina, where they may contribute to inflammation," continues Walsh. "Therefore, this may actually contribute to the disease process itself." Better understanding of this process may lead to treatments, and possibly prevention, by manipulating the paths of the immune system.

"I really enjoy the learning process, and I am looking forward to returning to the classroom," offers Walsh. "I love the academic side of my work as much as working with my patients."

A long-time New Orleans resident, Walsh says she enjoys living in North Carolina. "My husband and I miss the music in New Orleans, but we enjoy all of the outdoor activities available in North Carolina and look forward to exploring the state."