

Dual Board Certification Puts Retinal Specialist at the Forefront of Ocular Pathology



As a fellow in ophthalmic pathology, Sander R. Dubovy, M.D., faced a decision. Should he complete another year of eye pathology or expand his knowledge of disease processes by completing a second residency in anatomic pathology? He decided on the latter, becoming one of only a handful of physicians that are board-certified in both ophthalmology and anatomic pathology.

“If you understand the pathology, you better understand what you are seeing clinically,” he explains. “It makes you a better diagnostic ophthalmologist.”

Today, Dubovy is assistant professor of ophthalmology and pathology and a fulltime retina specialist. He serves as medical director of the ocular pathology laboratory at the Florida Lions Eye Bank located at Bascom Palmer.

Dubovy, who graduated from the University of Virginia and the New York University School of Medicine, was drawn to the field of eye pathology early in his ophthalmic residency training at the University of Chicago. After completing a fellowship in ophthalmic pathology at the Wilmer Eye Institute, he served a two-year residency in anatomic pathology at the Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons. During his pathology residency Dubovy served as a special fellow in the department of ophthalmic pathology at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, D.C. “It was a tremendous experience,” he recalls. “The Armed Forces Institute has always been a place to send unique cases.”

Dubovy completed his training abroad, spending a year at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London. There he trained under Bascom Palmer alumnus Alan Bird, M.D., an internationally recognized expert in inherited retinal degeneration and degenerative eye disease.

With eight years of post-medical school training near completion, Dubovy received a call from Robert Rosa, Jr., M.D., then director of ophthalmic pathology at Bascom Palmer. “Dr. Rosa had decided to move home to Texas, so he called me to meet with members of the faculty,” Dubovy says, adding, “I was hired by Dr. Richard Forster, interim chairman of Bascom Palmer. The position was one I could not pass up. I was given the opportunity to run a very busy ocular pathology lab and have a clinical practice in retina.”

Dubovy calls the ocular pathology laboratory, founded by Dr. Victor Curtin in a unique association with the Florida Lions Eye Bank, a “wonderful resource.” It is one of the very few pathology laboratories in the country that is solely dedicated to ocular pathology. It is amongst the busiest and one of the few, Dubovy points out, that is expanding in size while most others are contracting.

In the laboratory, tissues from eye surgeries performed at Bascom Palmer and other sites in Florida, the southeast, the Caribbean and Central and South America are evaluated. More than 2,300 surgical specimens are processed each year, including more than 300 globes (eyeballs) and a wide variety of conjunctival, corneal, orbital, lid and intraocular lesions. Dubovy’s knowledge of general pathology is invaluable in these evaluations. “We are often dealing with metastatic disease,” he says. “We get a lot of tumors. When I receive a metastasis of a breast tumor or a bone tumor, I can diagnose it without much difficulty because I have seen it before during my general pathology training.” Dubovy’s lab also works closely with medical examiner offices, evaluating about 75 pairs of eyes each year for suspected abuse or trauma.

Once evaluated and processed, the specimens are carefully preserved for research and teaching purposes. Dubovy says the on-site collection of more than 50,000 specimens, including glass slides and paraffin blocks, allow for wonderful correlations and a true understanding of disease process. “Much of what we receive is obscure and unique,” he says. “Students get to see what is happening in the clinic at the tissue level. It provides valuable training and improves their understanding of the pathophysiology of ophthalmic disease. By applying lessons learned in the laboratory, the residents become better physicians able to care for patients.”

Dubovy is also medical director of the non-profit Florida Lions Eye Bank. He was named to the position within months of joining Bascom Palmer. The eye bank was established in 1962 to provide donor eye tissue to ophthalmologists for corneal transplantation. The eye bank also provides donor scleral tissue (the white portion of the eye), whole eyes for ophthalmic research and operates the pathology lab.

Dubovy spends two days each week in his clinical retina practice. He is currently an investigator on several research studies investigating new treatment strategies for patients with macular degeneration. He is also interested in correlating clinical findings with pathological findings and is working specifically with OCT imaging of the retina.

In both his clinical and laboratory practice, Dubovy is committed to teaching the residents and fellows he trains to become “quality, intellectually honest and caring physicians.” Dubovy credits two mentors: Bird, from whom he learned a great deal about ethics and patient care; and W. Richard Green, M.D., a professor of ophthalmology and pathology, from whom he learned the importance of scientific inquiry and academic integrity, with helping him become the physician he is today. “I was given a gift to work with both of them and I feel it is my duty to do the same thing with my students,” says Dubovy, who has won three teaching awards while at Bascom Palmer.

Dubovy lives in Coconut Grove, with his wife Sarah, an attorney, and their 2½-year-old son, David.

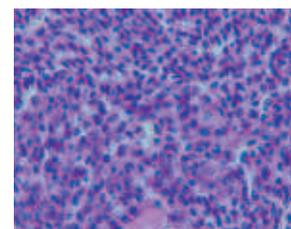
“I couldn’t ask for a better job; I really like what I do,” Dubovy adds. “I have the unique opportunity to care for patients through both a retinal and pathology practice, teach residents and fellows, direct an eye bank and investigate the pathophysiology of disease in the laboratory. I only wish there were eight days in a week.”

OCULAR SPECIMENS

As medical director of Bascom Palmer’s ocular laboratory, Dubovy sees more than 2,300 surgical specimens each year.



A choroidal malignant melanoma filling much of the eye.



Microscopic photograph of malignant melanoma cells from the tumor in the above photograph.