

Cancer on the surface of the eye has met its match.

Cornea specialist

# Carol L. Karp, M.D.

For Carol L. Karp, M.D., associate professor of clinical ophthalmology at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, interest in the international aspects of healthcare developed early in life. In fact, while at Brown University pursuing her medical degree, Karp was awarded a grant to work on blindness prevention in Peru, and later worked on similar programs in Spain and India. Karp completed her internship and residency at the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center in Ann Arbor.

An associate professor and expert in the management of ocular surface tumors and cataract surgery, Karp joined the faculty of Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in 1994, after completing a fellowship in cornea and external disease at the center.

“Bascom Palmer is world renown for excellence in eye care; I was honored to join the faculty,” says Karp, adding that the appointment also offered an opportunity for her to continue to serve as a bridge to educate physicians and medical students in South and Central America.

In the late 1990s, Karp pioneered a medical treatment for ocular surface squamous neoplasia, cancers that are similar to skin cancers, but grow on the surface of the eye. While studying the effectiveness of interferon on other diseases, Karp became interested in the drug’s anti-viral and anti-neoplastic properties. She designed a protocol to study the drug in patients with ocular surface tumors, curing them of their cancer without surgery. Her research has produced several landmark articles on the topic.

“The results were dramatic from the very first patient,” says Karp, who investigated interferon using both injections and drops to the eye.

Karp’s work, which received the First Place Special Interest Research Award from the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery in 1998, helped to change the standard of care for the treatment of ocular surface tumors. She has lectured nationally and internationally on the topic of interferon and other topical chemotherapies for the treatment of squamous neoplasia on the eye.

In addition to treating patients with eye surface tumors, Karp’s clinical practice includes patients with traditional cornea and external disease problems. She is considered an expert in cataracts, cornea and refractive surgery, and sees patients from all over the world. For years, Karp has been teaching cataract surgery techniques in Central and South America. Fluent in Spanish, she is a frequent lecturer on the topic of phacoemulsification, a technique for cataract removal which involves making a tiny incision in the cornea and removing clouded lens material using a pencil-like instrument inserted through the opening.

“Cataract is the primary cause of reversible blindness; it is a dramatic problem internationally,” she says. “There are so many patients whose vision can be saved with a single surgery.” Teaching others has long been a focus of Karp’s medical career.

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“I see myself as an educator. I think one of the greatest gifts is to be able to teach my patients, residents, fellows and medical students,” she says. “Teaching is a way of sharing information, producing better physicians, and helping patients understand and cope with their disease.”

At Bascom Palmer, Karp trains residents and fellows in the skills of cataract extraction and phacoemulsification. In addition to an annual cataract surgery teaching course and wet lab, she operates with fellows each week. She is co-director of an ophthalmology course for sophomore medical students and lectures regularly to senior medical students. Karp hosts 8 to 12 medical students each year from the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and other medical schools in the U.S. and abroad, and regularly hosts foreign corneal doctors as observers in her clinic and operating room.

Among the significant recognition Karp has received for her work is the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Achievement Award she received in 2001 for her accomplishments and service to the academy, where she served on several task forces and was co-editor of a web-based learning journal.

“Being involved in the American Academy of Ophthalmology is a way for me to teach, share and improve the quality of care on a national level,” she says.

Along with her service to the AAO, Karp is an associate examiner for the American Board of Ophthalmology and serves as a member of the New Device Panel for the Food and Drug Administration.

Outside of Bascom Palmer, Karp is an avid athlete, running every morning at the “crack of dawn.” She’s easy to spot on Miami Beach with her double jogger pushing her two young children, Adam and Noah. “I find running in the morning provides me time with my children and peace and serenity seeing the sun rise. It reminds me of what’s important in life – spending time with the people you love and being grateful for everything we have.”