

Addition of renowned physician, researcher and educator is latest step in Palm Beach County expansion plans

Terrence P. O'Brien, M.D.

One of the world's leading experts in the fields of refractive surgery and ocular infectious disease, Terrence P. O'Brien, M.D., joined Bascom Palmer Eye Institute's medical staff in October after fifteen years at the Wilmer Eye Institute of John Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore.

Terrence P. O'Brien, M.D., was in his early 20s when he made his first major contribution to the field of ophthalmology. Recognizing that treatment for people with eye infections lagged far behind treatment for people with systemic infections, O'Brien began testing new antibiotics as eye drops, eventually helping to develop several antibiotics into eye drops. His work had impact around the world.

Today, some 20 years later, O'Brien is one of the world's leading experts in the fields of refractive surgery and ocular infectious disease. He joined Bascom Palmer Eye Institute's medical staff in October 2005 after fifteen years at the Wilmer Eye Institute of John Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore. A professor and researcher, he holds the Charlotte Breyer Rodgers Distinguished Chair in Ophthalmology and is director of the Refractive Surgery Service at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute at Palm Beach Gardens. His appointment is the latest step in the institute's Palm Beach expansion.

O'Brien says Palm Beach is "almost exploding" in terms of people who need eye care, not just for rare and complex conditions, but general eye care as well. "I am really very excited and lucky to join Bascom Palmer at this time, and in some small way to contribute," he says.

At the Wilmer Eye Institute, O'Brien was the Tom Clancy Professor of Ophthalmology and director of Refractive Surgery and Ocular Infectious Diseases. O'Brien had conducted a refractive surgical procedure on Clancy, one of the best-selling authors of his generation, that successfully corrected a rare condition that threatened profound vision loss, and additionally elimi-

nated the need for Clancy's thick trademark spectacles.

According to O'Brien, Wilmer was one of the first academic centers to have an excimer laser. That was 1987, and the unwieldy machine filled almost the entire room. While the laser was initially used for therapeutic applications, he realized the laser "was here to stay," and further investigation into possible applications got under way. "The early days were exciting," he recalls. "There was a unique collaboration between clinical doctors, physicists, astronomers and surgeons. My interest was piqued."

"I see things happening at a very rapid pace in terms of population expansion and the development of technology," says O'Brien. He believes the next advance will be using the laser to help patients who have lost the ability to read with aging. He is also involved in studies of various lens implants to achieve customized results, refractive lens exchange where early cataracts are replaced with a multi-focal lens to correct vision, and techniques to modify or eliminate the flap in LASIK procedures.

As intense as his interest in refractive surgery, O'Brien has never abandoned his interest in external diseases and cornea, particularly corneal transplant. Currently, there are very effective ways to transplant only the diseased portion of the cornea using a laser rather than replacing the entire cornea, he says. "We are talking about cut and paste at a very sophisticated level."

Neither has he abandoned his interest in ocular microbiology. As founder of the Eye Microbiology Lab at Wilmer, he looks forward to being a part of



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Bascom Palmer’s microbiology lab, which he calls “very sophisticated.” Presently, he is working on developing new antifungal drops that can be effective against fungal eye infections. “Fungal infections can be blinding,” he says, adding that young men, especially agricultural workers and farmers, are prone to fungal infections. “Effective drops could have a major impact on global blindness.”

O’Brien’s interest in ophthalmology began at an early age when he became fascinated by his own eye doctor. As his interest grew, O’Brien says he became reacquainted with the eye as an organ of beauty and marveled at the function of the eye. “It was a romance complete.”

Though his time is largely occupied by professional pursuits, O’Brien says he relaxes by participating in the traditional ritual of the Japanese tea ceremony. He learned about the art from his wife, Masako O’Brien, Ph.D., a master and teacher of the highly ritualized and indulgent ceremony. The Drs. O’Brien, who have a 19-year-old son, had a large Japanese tea room in their home in Maryland, where they lived before moving to Palm Beach.