



## William E. Smiddy, M.D.

William E. Smiddy, M.D., is bringing world-renown eye care to Southwest Florida. Twice each month the Bascom Palmer professor of ophthalmology and retina specialist drives across the state to treat patients at Bascom Palmer's Retina Center at Naples opened earlier this year.

Specializing in surgical diseases of the retina, Smiddy and his colleagues are helping make access to nationally renowned specialists, like himself, available and more convenient for thousands of patients in Southwest Florida.

Smiddy's field of specialty, surgical treatment of retinal problems, includes conditions such as retinal detachments, complications of cataract surgery and diabetic retinopathy. His particular area of interest is surgical treatment of macular diseases such as epiretinal membranes and macular holes. Smiddy spends about 90 percent of his time on clinical work. As such, the vast majority of his research efforts involve clinical care. Although the majority of his patients are aged 60 and older, he sees a full spectrum of ages, as trauma and diabetes usually afflict younger patients, while retinal detachments are more common in middle age.

A macular hole, Smiddy explains, occurs in the central part of the retina called the macula. Macular holes are likely the result of a combination of degenerative change and traction by the vitreous, a gel-like substance, pulling away from the center of the retina.

In the early 1990s, Dr. Smiddy contributed to the development of vitrectomy for the treatment of macular holes, and performed clinical studies defining subgroups that would respond best. As a consequence, macular holes, previously thought untreatable, are now one of the most successfully treatable retinal conditions.

Although only one-half millimeter or less in size, the holes can lead to loss or distortion of central vision. Left untreated, they render patients, usually in their 60s, 70s or 80s, unable to read regular-size print.

“Losing the ability to read can have a huge impact on quality of life at that age,” Smiddy says.

Vitrectomy enables surgeons to close about 90 percent of macular holes. The procedure involves removing the vitreous gel from the eye and replacing it with a gas bubble that acts as a temporary bandage while the hole heals. Smiddy was involved in clinical trials that followed its discovery and was among the first physicians in the world to perform macular hole surgery in 1991.

Diabetic retinopathy, which is due to diabetes, occurs when the tiny blood vessels of the retina become damaged and begin to bleed or leak fluid into the retina. In its more advanced stage, blood vessels become blocked, starving the retina of necessary nutrients and leading to a process of abnormal blood vessel growth called neovascularization.

Smiddy has been active in diabetic retinopathy clinical studies for more than a decade. Along with Bascom Palmer professor Harry W. Flynn, Jr., M.D., he has published several papers and book chapters on diabetic retinopathy, and in 2000, a compilation of existing work on the eye disease for the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO). He has been the senior instructor for a course on diabetic retinopathy at the AAO for 13 years.

Another of Smiddy’s interests is treating complications of cataract surgery. He was the first to develop intraocular lens repositioning techniques for certain special situations, and has published widely on surgical correction of incomplete cataract removal and intraocular infections.

Smiddy discovered his interest in the field of ophthalmology during his sophomore year of college when he became involved in research with a cornea specialist at Johns Hopkins University. “After that exposure I never found anything more interesting in other fields of medicine,” he says. Later, during his surgical rotation, Smiddy worked with world renown, Bascom Palmer-trained retina specialist, Ronald Michels, and surgical retina was “love at first sight.”

Smiddy’s significant accomplishments in the field of ophthalmology have garnered recognition worldwide. In 2002, he was honored with the Macula Society’s Rosenfeld Award and in 1999, the Belgian Society’s Francois Prize, an international prize awarded annually to the physician under age 40 who has made the greatest contributions to the diagnosis and treatment of macular holes. He has received honor and senior honor awards from the Vitreous Society and the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland and a medical degree from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. He completed an ophthalmology residency and a vitreoretinal fellowship at Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins University.

When he’s not in the office, Smiddy is generally spending time with his wife and eight children, ranging in age from five to 20. All, he says, are good competitive swimmers. “They are the true focal point in my life.”

#### DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

A person with diabetes is at risk for developing diabetic retinopathy, the leading cause of blindness in young and middle-aged adults today. The longer a person has diabetes, the greater their chance of developing diabetic retinopathy.



Normal Retina



Non-Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy

#### SYMPTOMS OF DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

- LOSS OF CENTRAL OR PERIPHERAL VISION
- VISUAL DISTORTIONS OR BLURRINESS
- TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT VISION LOSS
- MAY HAVE NO SYMPTOMS DESPITE THE PRESENCE OF DISEASE.

If you have diabetes, get a dilated eye exam at least once a year. More frequent exams may be necessary after diabetic retinopathy is diagnosed.

To schedule an appointment with a retina specialist, please call 1-888-845-0002.