



Women in Ophthalmology Perspectives from Around the World (and Eye!)

by Brooke Herron

It goes without saying that the world is a diverse place: From East to West, there can be pretty vast differences in culture — including a woman's role in society. However, there can be a lot of similarities, too — especially in the medical field. In this *Women in Ophthalmology* series, we interviewed five female ophthalmologists from the United States, Singapore and Malaysia to hear their thoughts on the challenges, celebrations and joys of being both a woman and an ophthalmologist. Let's hear from them...

Dr. Chelvin Sng, Singapore

At *CAKE*, we often turn to Dr. Chelvin Sng for her ophthalmic insight and expertise. In fact, she has been with the magazine since its first “baking,” serving on the Advisory Board and regularly contributing to articles. Dr. Sng is a consultant at the National University Hospital (NUH) and an assistant professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

“I was aghast that she even asked whether my menstrual cycle coincided with the date of her surgery, as she believed that would affect my surgical performance!”

— Dr. Chelvin Sng



All dressed up: Dr. Chelvin Sng and her family.

#1: Do women face additional challenges compared to men in ophthalmology?

Dr. Sng: Indeed, women do face additional challenges compared to men in ophthalmology. Societal expectations



that mothers should remain the primary caregivers of their young children still remain in many cultures — even if the mothers are working full-time. Hence, many female ophthalmologists are forced to compromise on their careers once they start a family.

surgery, as she believed that would affect my surgical performance! Fortunately, the surgery went well and she has since rightfully changed her perception of female surgeons. This really highlights the misogyny that female ophthalmologists are faced with sometimes.

#2: Why is it important to celebrate women in ophthalmology?

It is timely to recognize the significant achievements of women in the field of ophthalmology, especially because women are often poorly represented in international forums and key leadership positions. Celebrating the talents and achievements of these women would also inspire the next generation of young female ophthalmologists to overcome their own challenges and break gender stereotypes.

#3: What is your proudest professional achievement?

I am proud that I helped launch the MIGS movement in the Asia-Pacific region. I was fortunate to be the earliest Asian surgeon to use several MIGS devices and was appointed the Convenor of the Asia-Pacific Glaucoma Society (APGS)-MIGS Interest Group, which trains and educates regional surgeons in the appropriate use of these devices.

I am also proud to be a co-inventor of the Paul Glaucoma Implant, which is a novel tube device that I now implant in patients with refractory and advanced glaucoma, with good outcomes.

#4: If you could wave a magic wand to improve one thing for women, what would it be?

I hope that “manels” would cease to exist. Women deserve to be heard and to have a voice.

#5: What does your perfect day off look like?

A lazy day spent with my wonderful husband and two sons, with lots of outdoor time to stave off the onset of childhood myopia!

Dr. Cathleen McCabe, Florida, USA

Dr. Cathleen McCabe serves as chief medical officer at Eye Health America. She is one of the foremost eye surgeons today, specializing in bladeless laser cataract surgery and LASIK at The Eye Associates in Sarasota, Florida. Over the years, Dr. McCabe has worked with CAKE on different educational projects, articles — and even as a speaker at our own CAKE & PIE Expo. So, it was natural that we’d come to Dr. McCabe to share her thoughts on the way forward for women in ophthalmology.

“I am very proud to have been recognized and asked to lecture on a technique I developed for suturing in-the-bag dislocated IOLs.”

— Dr. Cathleen McCabe

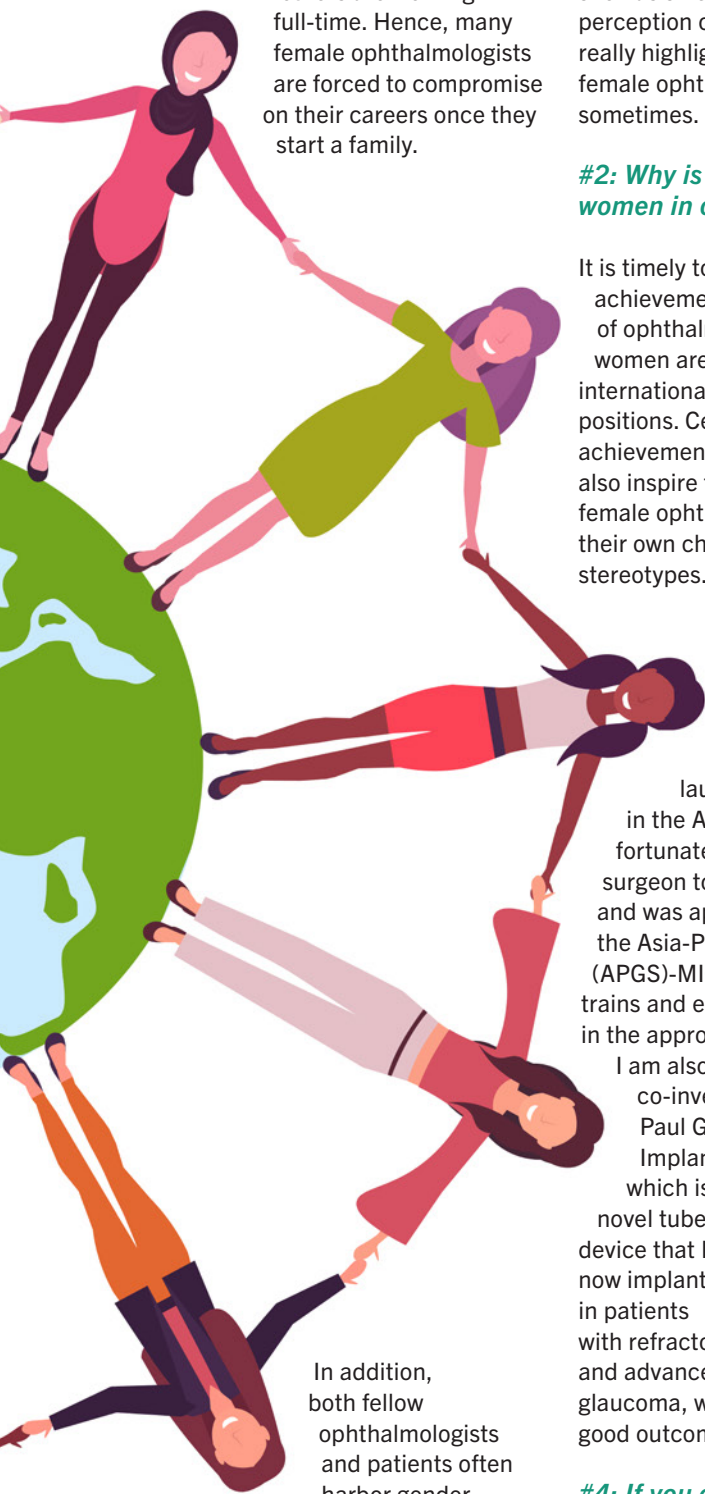
#1: Do women face additional challenges compared to men in ophthalmology?

Dr. McCabe: Although there has been progress and women now make up a greater percentage than ever before of doctors graduating from ophthalmology residencies, women are still underrepresented in academic leadership positions, at the podium,

in organizational leadership positions, and serving as board members. Some of the challenges include balancing child-rearing, a desire for better work/life balance and more flexible hours, and only slowly improving mentorship



Dr. Cathleen McCabe and her husband during Holi.



In addition, both fellow ophthalmologists and patients often harbor gender stereotypes that female ophthalmologists have to overcome. I was once referred a female patient who required glaucoma surgery. She admitted that she preferred male surgeons and had never had a female surgeon prior to this. I was aghast that she even asked whether my menstrual cycle coincided with the date of her



models for women in the earlier parts of their careers.

#2: Why is it important to celebrate women in ophthalmology?

Drawing attention to the many accomplishments of women surgeons, clinicians and researchers in ophthalmology shine a light that can inspire and guide younger female physicians. More diversity in our physicians improves patient care. Women bring different communication skills, different perspectives and different approaches to patient care and surgery, enriching the variety of solutions we have available to treat our patients.

#3: What is your proudest professional achievement?

I am very proud to have been recognized and asked to lecture on a technique I developed for suturing in-the-bag dislocated IOLs. This low-technology technique can be used anywhere in the world with very little special instrumentation and avoids more complex surgery in most cases. It has been wonderful to hear from other surgeons how it has helped them to care for their patients.

#4: If you could wave a magic wand to improve one thing for women, what would it be?

Equal numbers in leadership, mentorship, research and advisory positions. It would be great for there to be a time where all women panels, faculty or boards would be as frequent and unremarkable as all-male panels, faculty and boards and that the majority would be mixed men and women. I would love for a time when young women saw examples of how they would like to craft their professional lives in women leaders everywhere they looked.

#5: What does your perfect day off look like?

Delicious fancy coffee and breakfast with my family ... made by my husband who is an amazing cook. No agenda. Lots of sunshine and outdoor time hiking, kayaking, walking on the beach or paddle boarding. A board game or movie with the family and friends — truffle popcorn (!) — and topped off with a good book. Bonus points if I get some yoga in too!



Dr. Cheryl Ngo enjoys a relaxing day off at the beach.

“There is a gender bias in choosing males over females for training opportunities or career progression during a woman's childbearing years.”

— Dr. Cheryl Ngo

#1: Do women face additional challenges compared to men in ophthalmology?

Dr. Ngo: Yes, there is a gender bias in choosing males over females for training opportunities or career progression during a woman's childbearing years, as maternity leave may be deemed to be disruptive to the service. As working mothers, we have the additional challenges of managing the family and children — on top of managing our professional careers, by taking on similar responsibilities as our male colleagues. Women are also often remunerated less than male colleagues of similar seniority/rank.

#2: Why is it important to celebrate women in ophthalmology?

Women wear multiple hats at work and at home, while continuing to make an impact in the lives of their families — as well as in the field of ophthalmology. Celebrating women in ophthalmology keeps talented women working, while inspiring those around them to continue managing a successful career and happy family at the same time.

#3: What is your proudest professional achievement?

Opening my own ophthalmology practice!

Dr. Cheryl Ngo, Singapore

Dr. Cheryl Ngo is a consultant and medical director at the Adult & Child Eye Clinic in Singapore. We last spoke to Dr. Cheryl Ngo for the CAKE 06 “Radio Show” cover story, where we asked for her insight into some of ophthalmology's most crucial industry issues — and now, she's back to discuss another critical issue: the struggles women still face in ophthalmology.



#4: If you could wave a magic wand to improve one thing for women, what would it be?

Achieving a work-life balance with flexible hours, shared parental duties, equal opportunities and remuneration for women.

#5: What does your perfect day off look like?

This is the easiest question to answer — a cool day at the beach with my family, and a glass of champagne in hand.

**Dr. Dee Stephenson,
Florida, USA**

Dr. Dee Stephenson is the founder and director of Stephenson Eye Associates in Venice, Florida, USA. We last interviewed Dr. Stephenson for our CAKE 07 “Back to the Future” cover story, where she shared her thoughts on the evolution and future of cataract surgery. Now, we welcome her back to shed her perspective on the difficulties women face in medicine.

#1: Do women face additional challenges compared to men in ophthalmology?

Dr. Stephenson: Women in medicine, not just ophthalmology, face additional challenges compared to men: We are paid less and are just as well trained, if not better trained than some of our male counterparts.

“We are paid less and are just as well trained, if not better trained than some of our male counterparts.”

— Dr. Dee Stephenson

#2: Why is it important to celebrate women in ophthalmology?

We have babies and still manage to bring our “game face” to work every day. Celebrating women in ophthalmology is a must — we need to lift each other up and celebrate our colleagues’ accomplishments and milestones. We are better as a united front than we will ever be alone.

#3: What is your proudest professional achievement?

My proudest professional achievement is the ability to pass down my knowledge to younger women in ophthalmology; to share my experiences, empathy and techniques with the hope of helping other women to better themselves, and maybe make their paths a little easier.

#4: If you could wave a magic wand to improve one thing for women, what would it be?

That women would be appreciated more — that we are unique, and we can do any job a man can do — and we deserve to get paid (at least) equally.

#5: What does your perfect day off look like?

A perfect day off is when I can cook a great meal from scratch and share it with my daughter, son-in-law and my mom — without being rushed or having to answer the phone!

**Prof. Dr. Mae-Lynn
Catherine Bastion,
Malaysia**

We always like a good crossover — so here, we took the chance to not only hear from female ophthalmologists from around the world ... but also from across the eyeball globe! Prof. Dr. Mae-Lynn Catherine Bastion is a professor of ophthalmology (vitreoretina) and senior consultant ophthalmologist at the Department of Ophthalmology, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and UKM Specialist Centre.

#1: Do women face additional challenges compared to men in ophthalmology?

Prof. Dr. Bastion: Yes definitely. In our Asian society, women are still seen to be — and willingly take on the role of

— the main child carer. Hence, women in ophthalmology juggle many tasks, including their career, children, family elders, etc. It is very challenging for them if they have big families. However, the families are also understanding and the grandparents and extended family often come forward to help.

For me, I couldn't have managed without my wonderful parents, Mdm. Boey Chooi Kheng and Mr. Raymond Alan Bastion

— they came over often to pick up the kids on days when I couldn't, for example during OT days or private clinic days, and kept an eye on the domestic help.

#2: Why is it important to celebrate women in ophthalmology?

It is important to celebrate women because they have overcome these challenges — and some have

emerged as top ophthalmologists, highly respected in their field. Add the challenge of taking on academic roles in the university ... and then add administration, research and formal teaching to the clinical tasks. Certainly, women in ophthalmology with their nurturing roles should be celebrated.

“In our Asian society, women are still seen to be — and willingly take on the role of — the main child carer.”

— Prof. Dr. Mae-Lynn Catherine Bastion

#3: What is your proudest professional achievement?

My proudest achievement would have to be my promotion to professor of ophthalmology (vitreoretina) at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in



Prof. Dr. Bastion and her family also enjoy traveling. In Dec. 2019, they visited Cappadocia, Turkey, to witness the hot air balloons take flight. Pictured are Prof. Dr. Bastion and her husband, Dr. Wong Yiing Cheong, and their children.



2015. I have continued to serve and endeavored to deserve this title and distinction. I have also tried to help deserving colleagues pursue their academic dreams to reach the same achievement.

#4: If you could wave a magic wand to improve one thing for women, what would it be?

It would be to allow them to have the support they need to pursue their dreams and ambitions while enjoying that close relationship with their loved ones.

#5: What does your perfect day off look like?

My perfect day off would be spent with my children, enjoying our pets, followed by an action movie at the cinema, play gym and shopping. 🛍️

Contributing Doctors



Prof. Dr. Mae-Lynn Catherine Bastion is a professor of ophthalmology (vitreoretina) and senior consultant ophthalmologist at the Department of

Ophthalmology, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and UKM Specialist Centre. She is the chairperson of the Vitreoretinal Chapter for the College of Ophthalmologists @ Academy of Medicine Malaysia and a fellow at the Academy of Medicine, Malaysia. Prof. Dr. Bastion is also the honorary treasurer of the Malaysian Society of Ophthalmology (MSO) and the vice-chairperson for the Malaysian Advocacy for Myopia Prevention (MAMP), Paediatric Special Interest Group @ MSO. Her interests include vitreoretinal surgery, diabetic retinopathy and diabetic wound healing, along with stem cell therapy for hereditary retinal diseases and optic nerve diseases.



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Dr. Cathleen McCabe

serves as Chief Medical Officer at Eye Health America. She is one of the foremost eye surgeons today, specializing in bladeless laser cataract surgery and LASIK at The Eye Associates in Sarasota, Florida. Dr. McCabe has performed over 45,000 cataract surgeries and more than 17,000 LASIK procedures. She has a keen interest in advancing the field of ophthalmology and has participated in numerous clinical trials, including innovations in intraocular lenses, perioperative medications, medications and devices to treat glaucoma, dry eye treatments and presbyopia correction. She is passionate about giving back to her local community, profession and globally and participates in charitable giving and volunteer efforts both at home and abroad. She is a board member of several charitable foundations in ophthalmology, including One World Global Health/Vision Quest, OOSS Gives, and others. Dr. McCabe received her medical degree from the Medical College of Wisconsin and received her residency training at the prestigious Bascom Palmer Eye Institute at the University of Miami's School of Medicine.



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Dr. Cheryl Ngo is a consultant and medical director at the Adult & Child Eye Clinic in Singapore. She completed her specialist ophthalmology training in Singapore, holds a Master of Medicine (ophthalmology), and received a medal for her fellowship examination in ophthalmology. Dr. Ngo is currently a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. She also completed a prestigious subspecialty fellowship training at the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Canada. She is the immediate past head of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus in the National University Hospital Singapore (NUHS) from 2014 to 2019, as well as the research director and an assistant professor of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. She remains as a visiting consultant to NUHS and an adjunct assistant professor at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, NUS.



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Dr. Chelvin Sng, BA, MBBChir,

MA(Cambridge), MRCSEd, FRCSEd, MMed, FAMS, is a consultant at the National University Hospital (NUH) and assistant professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS). She is also an honorary consultant at Moorfields Eye Hospital, London, and an adjunct clinic investigator at the Singapore Eye Research Institute (SERI). A pioneer of minimally invasive glaucoma surgery (MIGS), Dr. Sng was the first surgeon in Asia to perform XEN, InnFocus Microshunt and iStent Inject implantation. A co-author of The Ophthalmology Examinations Review, Dr. Sng has also written several book chapters and publications in various international journals. Proficient in conventional glaucoma surgery and trained in complex cataract surgery, Dr. Sng co-invented a new glaucoma drainage device, which was patented in 2015. When not working, Dr. Sng can be found volunteering in medical missions in India and across Southeast Asia.



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Dr. Dee Stephenson, MD, FACS, is the founder and director of Stephenson Eye Associates in Venice, Florida. Dr. Stephenson has been recognized by numerous institutions and journals for

her expertise and contributions to cataract surgery and premium IOLs. She was listed as one of the 250 in Premier Surgeons of Leading Innovators, and more recently was named in the Ocular Surgery News Premier Surgeon 300 and Who's Who in Ophthalmology. Dr. Stephenson shares her knowledge with ophthalmologists worldwide, and to ophthalmology residents, as an associate professor at the Morsani College of Medicine Department of Ophthalmology at the University of South Florida in Tampa. She is on the editorial board of CRST, editor of the cataract section for AAO Focal Points, a founding member of AECOS, and CEDARS/ASPENS.



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