

2014-2015 Fellow



Dr. Danielle Natale

When many people think of optometry, they think about a doctor that can make your vision better with glasses and contacts, a doctor that can perform ocular health examinations and manage common eye diseases. But as the Lions Club members know, many people in the world are not so lucky as to be able to be cured so simply. Optometry is a diverse field with many sub-specialties beyond caring for people straightforward glasses and contacts. As I completed my Doctor of Optometry degree at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in Philadelphia, I loved every aspect of optometry from ocular disease to pediatrics and binocular vision to low vision rehabilitation. If you would have asked me what my future career path would look like while I was completing my degree, I could never have predicted the path I traveled.

After graduation, I returned to my hometown on Long Island and completed a residency at the Northport VA hospital. I found a residency that offered diverse specialty clinics with excellent mentors in each specialty, including low vision rehabilitation. That residency changed my life in many ways but one of the biggest changes came when my mentor recommended that I pursue the Lions Low Vision Fellowship at Wilmer Eye Institute.

Clinically, I had already been exposed to specialty low vision care during my residency, but the low vision fellowship at Wilmer was a full emersion. Learning low vision in a full time clinic with access to the latest technologies and experts in all aspects of low vision is invaluable. Working as a team with occupational therapists, certified low vision therapists, and physicians taught me what high level, coordinated low vision care looks like and how to implement those practices myself. In addition to the clinical opportunities to gain more exposure and learn advanced techniques in low vision, the fellowship allowed me to participate in a research project. It taught me to think more critically, how to collect data, and how to communicate research findings orally and in print.

Currently, I am working at the Krieger Eye Institute of Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, MD. My current position is ideal because I get to practice optometry in all of its forms. I am the only optometrist working in a multi-specialty eye care practice. As the only optometrist, I am responsible for the specialized skills that ODs are trained for best including difficult refractions, managing double vision, specialty contact lenses, primary eye care, and, of course, low vision. I had the great opportunity and pleasure to design my low vision practice by emulating all of the best practices I learned during my fellowship. I have been able to help the glaucoma, retina, and cornea specialists manage their patients' visual functional needs that would go unmet without the invaluable experience of the Lions Low Vision Fellowship. In addition, our practice has an ophthalmology residency and I am lucky enough to participate in the training of these young ophthalmologists. Didactically, I teach optics, contact lenses, and low vision. The residents are assigned to my clinic to further learn about these topics in practice.

Being selected to be a Lions Low Vision Fellow has taught me much, changed the course of my career, and will hopefully continue to provide an unparalleled educational experience for future generations.