

Guest Editorial

Dr. David Paton – The path towards academic global ophthalmology

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It is unlikely Dr. David Paton would have been anything other than an ophthalmologist. The son of Dr. R. Townley Paton, who founded the first eye bank, is a descendant of one of the first ophthalmologists in the United States.^[1] In a career spanning six decades, Dr. Paton forged his own indelible path in ophthalmology and was instrumental in the new subspecialty of Academic Global Ophthalmology (AGO).

In 1956, he graduated from the John Hopkins School of Medicine and interned at New York Hospital, Cornell University Medical College the following year. Before completing his residency at Wilmer Eye Institute, Dr. Paton undertook 2 years of research at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland.

In the 4th year of his residency, Dr. Paton practiced at St. John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, Jordan, one of his many international expeditions that shaped his contributions to global ophthalmology. It was here he introduced the hospital to corneal transplant surgery and established one of the earliest eye banks in the Middle East, a glimpse into his future with ORBIS.^[2]

Dr. Paton returned to John Hopkins as a faculty member in 1964, but the paucity of eye care and adequate teaching he witnessed in developing nations continued to shape his early career. In Sightline's Global Impact article he says, "I thought, how in the world are we going to provide improved care that can be adapted to various countries?"^[3]

ORBIS, now ORBIS International, was his unconventional, yet effective, solution. The goal was to circumvent barriers to access for doctors and nurses from low-income countries through its Flying Eye Hospital. In 1982, operations as a mobile teaching hospital took flight and continue to this day. From 1982 to 1984, he served as the first medical director of the King Khaled Eye Specialist Hospital (KKESH). During these formative years for the hospital, Dr. Paton was

responsible for recruiting the staff and academic affiliations that would ultimately shape KKESH into becoming one of the foremost hospitals in the world.

This was just the start of Dr. David Paton's immersion into solving the equation of public health care delivery, global ophthalmology and academia. His paper *the imperative for change in health care delivery: An ophthalmologist's viewpoint* puts forward public funding and technology as an answer.^[4] These solutions, however, cannot exist in a vacuum and require the involvement of academia to effect these changes.

Towards this end, Dr. Paton proposed an AGO course to combat systemic disparities in global public health care in ophthalmology. It is an intersectional curriculum that provides an optimal foundation for young ophthalmologists to understand the role of public health, instructions and analysis on the eye needs of populations. Now, many years later, there are seven AGO fellowship programs offered in the U.S. with likely several more emerging in the coming years.

Dr. Paton continues to be a vocal advocate for academic integration and funding for global ophthalmology. His memoir, *second sight: Views from an eye doctor's odyssey*, apart from providing insights into Dr. Paton's career, has helped raise funding to bridge academic gaps in ophthalmology.

Although he has been the recipient of countless awards and honors, including the Presidential Citizens Medal, Dr. Paton's vision to combat avoidable blindness across nations and inspire the next generation of ophthalmologists to do the same is his greatest legacy.

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