

# THE PETER R. AND RUTH LAIBSON ENDOWED CORNEA LECTURESHIP

## ENSURING A LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

When Peter Laibson, MD, joined the medical staff at Wills Eye Hospital in 1965, he was their first full-time physician fellowship-trained in cornea. At the time, the subspecialty was in its infancy.

It would not be a stretch to describe the Cornea Service's Director Emeritus as a pioneer in the field. The 89-year-old Dr. Laibson grew the service to become a world-class leader in corneal transplants and the discovery and treatment of corneal diseases. His impact on the subspecialty through groundbreaking research and clinical achievements (he performed around 8,000 corneal transplants during his career) cannot be understated. And like the revered mentors that helped shape his professional path, so too has he impacted the physicians of the future.

"I'm very passionate about ophthalmic, and especially corneal, education," said Dr. Laibson, who trained hundreds of residents and fellows during his 47-year tenure at Wills. In 1967, he created the first corneal fellowship at Wills Eye. He and his wife, Ruth Laibson, later established an endowed corneal fellowship, now one of three at the hospital. Although he officially retired in 2012, his deep interest in the field remains.

To ensure that the advancement in cornea will live on, the couple recently established the **Peter R. and Ruth Laibson Endowed Cornea Lectureship**. The inaugural lecture took place at the Fall 2022 Cornea Update at Wills Eye in late October. The featured speaker, Guillermo Amescua, MD, shared the latest developments in the management of inherited and acquired ophthalmic diseases as well as emerging therapies and screening modalities.



From left: Peter Laibson, MD; Guillermo Amescua, MD; and Ruth Laibson at the inaugural endowed lecture in October 2022 at Wills Eye Hospital.

About half of Dr. Laibson's clinical practice was dedicated to transplants, the other half to infections and diseases of the cornea. "My major interest was in treating infections of the cornea due to viruses such as herpes simplex, herpes zoster, and adenovirus," said Dr. Laibson. He noted that among its many innovations, the Cornea Service was the first to recognize a bacterial disease from wearing contact lenses overnight, and helping to discover corneal dystrophies in families, requiring transplants.

Throughout his career, Dr. Laibson published more than 345 academic papers, many in collaboration with his colleagues and fellows. In fact, being a mentor has been a great source of pride. Some of his fellows were from other countries and brought their acquired

expertise back to their medical communities. As a result, Dr. Laibson has lectured in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Japan, Hong Kong, India, Europe, and Israel, to name a few.

Dr. Laibson, born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, graduated in 1959 from the State University of New York, Downstate Medical Center. He attended Harvard Medical School's Basic Science Course in Ophthalmology, followed by a residency at Wills Eye Hospital and a corneal fellowship at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. "This was the first major corneal fellowship in the U.S.," said Dr. Laibson. "It was started by Claes Dohlman, MD, a giant in the field, my mentor, and my very close friend." The Laibsons recently visited Boston to celebrate Dr. Dohlman's 100th birthday.

"The evolution in the corneal field has truly been phenomenal," said Dr. Laibson. ■■■

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—Peter and Ruth Laibson

"We are delighted to establish this lectureship, which will enhance the exposure of Wills practitioners to new ideas and concepts in the field," said the Laibsons. "An enriched educational experience for residents and fellows has been the hallmark of the Cornea Service since its inception, and we are incredibly proud to have been part of that. It is our hope that this legacy will continue for future generations."

Dr. Laibson, who also served as medical director of the Lions Eye Bank of Delaware Valley for 50 years until his retirement from that position in 2017, reflected on the remarkable changes he has witnessed over the decades: "When I first began, the corneal transplant took an hour, and it was about a year before a patient's vision improved. Today, it's a very different procedure. In most cases, it takes about 20 minutes, requires very few or no sutures, and patients usually see well within days."