

MEET AJAY E. KURIYAN, MD

Dr. Kuriyan joined the **WILLS EYE RETINA SERVICE** and **MID ATLANTIC RETINA** in 2019. He is the recipient of three highly competitive research grants and was named one of “40 Under 40” by *Ophthalmology Management*.

Q. Why Wills Eye and Mid Atlantic Retina?

A. It’s truly a privilege to be part of Wills Eye and Mid Atlantic Retina. I chose this path because of the exceptional opportunities with clinical and surgical care, research, and teaching at the highest level in retina.

We are fortunate to have unbelievable clinical and surgical volume for our research projects—from investigator-initiated studies to clinical trials. It’s amazing to collaborate with accomplished basic science researchers, such as Nancy Philp, PhD, of Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University.

The conferences and lecture series at Wills Eye Hospital enable the Retina Service team to learn from each other and notable guest lecturers. There are highly skilled and talented colleagues in all of the services at Wills, an incredible advantage when managing complex patients.

Q. What do you hope to accomplish through these research grants?

A. The Alcon Research Institute’s Young Investigator Award, the Macula Society’s Mills and Margaret Cox Research Award, and the Retina Society Research Award all fund a collaborative translational research project focused on proliferative vitreoretinopathy (PVR) pathogenesis. PVR is the most common cause of retinal detachment surgery failure and occurs in up to 10 percent of patients. There are currently no treatments for this disease process. This project leverages the unique ability of Wills Eye Hospital to access patient surgical tissue samples and, together with Dr. Philp, to study a novel aspect of the disease’s pathogenesis.

We hope these grants will help us identify novel treatments for PVR and solidify the translational research infrastructure between Wills and Jefferson.

Q. What inspired you to become a physician and specifically an ophthalmologist/retina specialist?

A. During my youth, my older sister, who has asthma, made frequent trips to the doctor. I was

deeply impacted by the special role physicians have in their patients’ lives. In medical school, I developed a strong appreciation of ophthalmology as a specialty. The mix of medical and surgical treatments, the art of the ophthalmic exam, elegant surgeries, and tangible benefits of ocular interventions on vision and quality of life, all played a role in my decision.

The ability to non-invasively image the eye and deliver treatments locally make ophthalmology a field that is ripe for rapid advancement. During residency, I gravitated toward retina pathology. I enjoy retina conferences, which feature a mix of surgical videos, clinical trial results, and translational research. You get the best of both worlds in retina clinics: long-standing relationships with patients, such as those requiring regular intravitreal injections and those needing short-term treatments, like laser for retinal tears. In the operating room, every case is unique. It’s an exciting time to be a retina specialist.

Q. How do you feel about being named one of “40 Under 40,” in recognition of your talent and as a future leader in ophthalmology?

A. It was an honor to be named to this list, but it’s really a reflection of all my family members and professional mentors who have supported me throughout my life and career. I am indebted to my medical school mentor at the University of Rochester, Dr. Steven Feldon. He was my first role model in ophthalmology and continues to be a source of inspiration. I was lucky to have outstanding clinical, surgical, and research mentors during residency and fellowship at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute.

My colleagues at Mid Atlantic Retina and Wills Eye Hospital are remarkable. My trainees and mentees ask great questions and motivate me to keep learning. Lastly, it is my patients who entrust me with their eye care and are the reason I strive to better understand and manage retina diseases through research. ■■■



FAST FACTS

AJAY E. KURIYAN, MD

Age: 39

Career Highlight: One of the team ophthalmologists for the Philadelphia 76ers, 2021–2022

Spouse: Tuma

Favorite Food: Home-cooked Indian

Children: Asha, 7; Ashish, 6

Favorite Hobby: Basketball

Favorite Music: 90s hip-hop

Favorite Ritual: Bedtime routine with kids