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Physician Spotlight: Dr. James Bedrick

ERIN LANE BEAM



Dr. Bedrick with his band RocDox

Dr. James Bedrick has an eye for detail.

As founder and president of the Charlotte- and Rock Hill-based ophthalmology practice, Mecklenburg Eye Associates, Bedrick performs micro-surgical procedures with instruments as small as 25-gauge needles. He pioneered macular hole repair in the Charlotte area.

"We have to remove the vitreous to be able to do the surgery," he explained. "Twenty-five gauge micro-forceps are then used to peel off any membrane that might be holding the hole open. An air and gas bubble is then placed in the vitreous cavity, which then closes the hole while the patient maintains a face down position."

The face down position allows the gas bubble to rise up and gently press on the back of the eye, effectively sealing the macular hole as the small retinal detachment surrounding it is reabsorbed.

Bedrick also developed the use of an instrument to evaluate patients who have had macular holes for prolonged periods; some had been affected for as many as 10 years.

"Prior to that period in the early '90s, lots of patients had developed these holes and had been told that they were permanently legally blind."

By using one of the blue field entoptoscope tests, he could determine which patients still had potentially good vision.

"One of our most gratifying patients had bilateral holes, which can happen in about 25 percent of cases, and this lady underwent surgery in both eyes, and is now driving her car with 20/40 vision," he reflected.

Bedrick's fascination with ophthalmology began in the fourth grade when he had his first eye exam.

"I went to the eye doctor and he showed me all his neat instruments and did an examination," he recalled.

With a single-minded sense of purpose, Bedrick, who grew up in Raleigh, decided to apply to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Because of its reputable ophthalmology department, Bedrick also attended medical school there after completing his bachelor's degree in 1974.

While other specialties were interesting to Bedrick, his wife, Adele, whom he met in high school and married in 1973, was convinced she would never see him if he accepted a residency in neurosurgery.

"I now operate on the brain's most important appendage," he noted. Ophthalmology proved to be a good fit for Bedrick, who was drawn to the diversity of patients he saw and the expanse of technology he used.

The evolving use of new and exciting medications and treating conditions previously untreatable were some of the most attractive aspects of the specialty, according to Bedrick.

Bedrick completed his residency in ophthalmology at the University of Pennsylvania's Scheie Eye Institute. He and Adele also welcomed their first child, Emily, while living in Philadelphia.

Next, he continued medical training at Emory University as part of the teaching faculty, focusing his

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fellowship on studying the retina-vitreous section of the eye. Both the retina and the vitreous can be involved in significant disease processes.



In 1982, Bedrick moved to Charlotte, in part because he felt there was a need for quality eye care in the area. Soon after arriving, his son, Jonathan, was born at Presbyterian Hospital in what is coincidentally now the Presbyterian Eye Center's recovery room, but was once the first birthing room in labor and delivery. In 1984, he founded Mecklenburg Eye Associates.

Bedrick sees patients with a variety of problems. Some require cataract or laser surgery; others require a simple eye exam and lens fitting. Bedrick also treats patients with age-related macular degeneration (AMD). A recent development in treating AMD has been the use of intravitreal injection treatments, especially anti-VEGF (vascular endothelial growth factor) drugs, some of which can cause a severe and legally blind AMD to dry up and in several cases disappear. These drugs are sometimes referred to as "ophthalmology's penicillin."

Bedrick also has a passion for improving eye care for diabetic patients who can have a wide variety of eye complications. In 2006, Bedrick created The Diabetic Eye Center.

"(We) provide state-of-the-art comprehensive and vitreo-retinal eye care for diabetic patients in a manner that makes efficient use of the patient's time by minimizing the need for multiple eye care providers and maximizing the quality of their vision by providing any needed laser or microsurgery as well as glasses, contact lenses, or low vision rehabilitation," he said. "We also educate patients using digital retinal imaging to reinforce the importance of tight blood sugar control, optimal physical conditioning and medical compliance in general."

Bedrick also travels to Atlanta to teach residents at Emory University and the Veteran's Administration Hospital. One of those students is his daughter, who is finishing up her residency in ophthalmology. His son is now an investment banker in New York City.

If he's not practicing or teaching medicine, Bedrick is likely spending time with his family. He also plays music in a band called RocDox. Bedrick founded the group in the late 1980s with another local doctor and now serves as its lead vocalist and guitarist. He described the band's style as "classic rock ... anything from Aretha to Zeplin."

But, ultimately, Bedrick's passion is eye care. And he hopes to "continue to offer personalized professional eye care of high quality."

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