



Maurice B. Landers, III, MD

Professor, UNC Ophthalmology
Vitreous Retina Specialist

“Diabetes is at epidemic proportions, and as the population ages, the number of people suffering from macular degeneration is growing as well. Every day is a new and interesting challenge...these past ten years at Carolina have been a real joy.”

UNC ophthalmologist Maurice “Reece” Landers III, MD—professor, physician, philanthropist, mentor—is taking the long view over a career that began in the late 1960s, and making an admission -- He once felt he didn’t have much to say to first- or second-year med students. As a vitreoretinal surgeon, he performed delicate operations inside the eye. This sort of subspecialty didn’t appear on a young doctor’s radar until years down the line, past medical school, internship, and residency, when the focus sharpens for a fellowship. “No, at the time, it was a little beneath my dignity,” he thought. “They didn’t know enough about the arcane work that I did to have a good conversation about it.”

Landers smiles about that now. “As I’ve gotten older, things have changed, and nowadays, I’m very much involved with the medical students,” he says. They help conduct research in his lab, and “we’ve started this eye clinic over at something called SHAC—Student Health Action Coalition. It’s all medical-student run. I’ve got a group of students that I work with offering care to the indigent. We try to give the students some introduction to ophthalmology. I even give a talk about why ophthalmology is really a wonderful thing to do with your life.” Landers and his wife Wendy work side by side to provide leadership and support to UNC medical students participating in SHAC.

“I love being around students who are so enthusiastic. They’re very young, and they’ve hardly seen any patients yet. They’ve just been in the lab and the textbooks and so on. They almost bring their patients in out of the parking lot to do the examination, and if you show them an eyelash out of place, they’re impressed. I like that. Being around them is invigorating.”

Over his career, Landers’ enthusiasm for the task at hand has seldom flagged. At UNC Eye, he has worked to improve patient care and helped to relieve physicians of burdensome dictation by leading the move to a state-of-the-art electronic medical records (EMR) and image management system—a 10-year effort made possible by the support of the Lincoln Healthcare Foundation (LHF), where Landers is president, and his wife Wendy Marbury serves on the LHF Board of Directors. LHF has helped ensure that UNC Eye is equipped with the latest in leading-edge technology. Through the generosity of the Lincoln Healthcare Foundation UNC Eye has recently purchased a new OPTOS® ultra-wide field fundus camera, a remarkable new machine that will afford UNC eye doctors a completely new approach to the diagnosis and management of retinal disease. Gifts totaling over one-half million dollars from the LHF to UNC Ophthalmology have helped support other high-tech diagnostic and assessment tools for patient care at UNC Eye. Marbury works at UNC Eye assisting in patient care and managing the EMR efforts.

Landers is among Carolina’s rare, storied professors who teach for the sheer joy of it—first joining the faculty when his long time friend and colleague Travis Meredith, MD, became chair a decade ago. Landers is widely published and internationally known for his work in treating patients suffering from macular degeneration and complications from diabetes; he has been a pioneer in the development of a number of instruments and procedures used in vitreoretinal surgery, including the first intraocular laser, the original temporary keratoprosthesis, recently updated with help from UNC medical students working in his lab, and several widely used lenses and viewing



Profile of Progress and Philanthropy

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systems for vitreous surgery. With colleagues at Duke in the early 80's, he formulated the currently accepted explanation of the beneficial action of lasers on diabetic retinopathy.

"I never anticipated any of this stuff as a kid growing up on the beach in Southern California," he muses. This was during the golden post-war era; lemon groves grew next door. He majored in biology at Princeton, graduated from medical school at the University of Michigan, and returned to the sunshine for his ophthalmology residency at the Jules Stein Eye Institute, at UCLA. His father and grandfather were general surgeons, and his early inclination was toward neurosurgery, but ophthalmology drew him in.

"Vitreoretinal surgery, in ophthalmology, is sort of the analog of neurosurgery," he observes. He was there during the exploratory years for this type of surgery. "When I started in residency, for the patients with diabetes, bleeding in their eyes and blindness, we could do nothing. We sent them home." Slowly, progress was made, beginning during his days at Duke University. "It was a new technology, a new surgery. Like heart or lung surgery, the first few years didn't go so well, then gradually it got better," he remembers. Some 30 years later, vitreoretinal surgery continues to improve.

Landers stayed at Duke for 15 years, participating in Duke Eye Center's rise to national and international prominence. His two daughters graduated from UNC while his son graduated from Duke. In 1984, he became Chief of the Retina Service at the University of California, Davis Medical School, and the 1990s found him in private practice. In 2001, he joined UNC Eye, helping set the department's upward trajectory, a decade of adding highly qualified physicians to its roster, building the research program, improving and expanding patient care, supporting its residents, and assisting in establishing five satellite clinics in and around the state.

Today, Landers is busier than ever. Diabetes is at epidemic proportions, and as the general population ages, the number of people suffering from macular degeneration is growing as well.

"I've had a lot of good luck," Landers says. "I got into a field that was new when the world was changing." He takes pleasure in "the people I've had to work with, the doctors, especially the trainees. I've got a lot of former fellows who had great success, and I've enjoyed that a lot. A number of my former vitreoretinal fellows have become chiefs of academic vitreoretinal services, and some even Department Chairs."

Even while he looks back, Landers also faces forward. "The late mythologist Joseph Campbell once made a very profound comment. He said "that looked at retrospectively; life seems to make good sense. But if you try to look even a couple of minutes into the future, you have no idea what's coming. So every day is a new and interesting challenge...and these past ten years at Carolina have been a real joy."



Alumni, Grateful Patients, and Friends

are invited to join UNC Eye in the establishment of The Maurice Landers, MD Endowment Fund to honor his major contributions of teaching, caring and contributing to the field of ophthalmology. This endowment will support the advancement of knowledge in the research and patient care of vitreoretinal eye diseases.

Online gifts can be made at

www.unceye.org

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