

KITTNER EYE CENTER | UNC DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

UNC EYE

Winter 2025

LEADERSHIP

From Local to Global Reach



Numbers at a Glance

Our mission is to provide the highest-quality eye care to the people of North Carolina and beyond with eye problems, regardless of their ability to pay.

14-YEAR GROWTH (2011-2025)

Outpatient Volume

56% 

Outpatient Visits
36,000 → 56,208

Surgical Volume

130% 

OR Cases
1,500 → 3,500+

OUTPATIENT CLINICS

- UNC Kittner Eye Center / UNC Optical Shop (Chapel Hill)
- UNC Health Eye Care at Cary
- UNC Specialty Care at Pittsboro
- Alamance Eye Center (Burlington)
- Fayetteville VA Medical Center

SURGERY SITES

- UNC Medical Center
- UNC Hospitals Hillsborough (campus)
- Chatham Hospital

OUTPATIENT FOOTPRINT



FLAGSHIP UNC Kittner Eye Center (Chapel Hill)

25,578

Square Feet

50

Exam Lanes

2

Fully Equipped
Procedure Rooms

1,200+

Frames
UNC Optical Shop Selection

PRIMARY SATELLITE

UNC Health Eye Care at Cary

3,800

Square Feet

8

Exam Lanes

1

Procedure Room

1

Dedicated Imaging Suite



Letter From the Chair



Donald L. Budenz, MD, MPH

Kittner Family Distinguished Professor
Chair, Department of Ophthalmology
(2011–2025)

Our doctors' and staff's compassion extends beyond providing care — they genuinely care about our patients. They have made me a better physician through their example.

It has been an honor and a privilege to lead the UNC Department of Ophthalmology. Together, we have accomplished incredible things over the past 14 years.

When I arrived, the eye clinic in the Ambulatory Care Center had only 26 exam lanes, small imaging and procedure rooms, a modest optical shop, and no true identity of its own. Together, we created the UNC Kittner Eye Center at Carolina Crossing. We transformed 26,000 square feet of shell space into 50 exam lanes across two floors, two spacious imaging centers, a children's playroom, and free parking for patients and staff. As a result of moving into a much larger clinic and moving all our surgeries from campus to Hillsborough Hospital, we dramatically increased our clinic and surgical volumes. From 2011 to 2025, clinic visits grew from 36,000 to over 56,000 and surgical

cases increased from under 1,500 to over 3,500. We opened the first UNC Eye Clinic in Wake County in 2015 (Holly Springs), followed by North Raleigh in 2020. This fall, we combined these two sites into a new, larger clinic in Cary. We also relocated practices from optometry offices in Roxboro and Pittsboro into our own space, allowing us to expand referrals to include all local optometry practices — more than doubling the number of surgeries performed outside UNC Hospitals.

We've expanded the residency program from nine to twelve positions and doubled our number of fellows from two to four. In 2012, a million-dollar donation from the North Carolina Eye Bank,



LEFT Budenz with Carolina Eye Research Institute (CERI) Co-Investigator/ Ocular Gene Therapy Researcher Matt Hirsch, PhD; **RIGHT** Teaching Residents at UNC Kittner Eye Center.



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now known as Miracles in Sight, allowed us to create a 16-station Microsurgical Skills Lab to train residents in eye surgery, neurosurgery, and otolaryngology. Our resident applications have grown from 485 for three spots per year to over 700 applications for our four spots per year. Our graduating residents are now highly sought after by prestigious fellowships and private practices looking to hire what I consider some of the best trained ophthalmologists in the country.

In the area of research, the department published fewer than 10 peer-reviewed papers annually; today, that number has risen to 50–60 each year. We created the Carolina Eye Research Institute with the help of donations from grateful patients to strengthen our research mission. Our translational researchers are making huge strides to develop gene therapies for inherited corneal diseases, corneal transplant rejection, age-related macular degeneration, diabetic eye disease, and ocular melanoma.

One of the things I'm most proud of is that the Kittner Eye Center provides medical and surgical eye care regardless of a patient's ability to pay. We deliver that care in the same facility, using the same equipment, staff, and doctors as for our insured patients. As the state's only public Department of Ophthalmology, quoting the Mission Statement that we developed in 2015: "We provide high quality eye care in order to meet the needs of patients with eye problems regardless of ability to pay or socioeconomic status." This has come at great financial cost but is at the heart of what we value most.

Beyond all these accomplishments, I've personally benefited from working with the faculty, trainees, and staff of the department and the clinic. Our doctors' and staff's compassion extends beyond providing care — they genuinely care about our patients. They have made me a better physician through their example.

Thank you — for your hard work, dedication, and compassion on behalf of our patients. They are better off because of your care. And I'm a better person for having worked alongside you. ■

Five Decades of Leadership: UNC Department of Ophthalmology

UNC Ophthalmology began training residents in collaboration with the McPherson Eye Hospital (Durham, NC) in 1956. The department was founded in 1977 and evolved into a nationally respected hub of academic teaching. For five decades, UNC Ophthalmology has recruited top talent due in part to its strength in leadership.

1956

Resident training begins in collaboration with the McPherson Eye Hospital in Durham, NC

1977

Department founded

David E. Eifrig, MD (1977–2000)

2000

Travis A. Meredith, MD (2000–2011)

2011

Donald L. Budenz, MD, MPH (2011–2025)

2025

Interim Chair **David Fleischman, MD, MS, FACS** (2025–Present)



BELOW, LEFT Recipient of the 2025 Robert N. Shaffer Award (AAO-hosted Glaucoma Symposium); **RIGHT** Budenz & fellow UNC Ophthalmology faculty at the 2018 Norma Berryhill Distinguished Lecture.

Emeritus Professor Dr. Beth Friedland

An Integrated Practice & Clinical Research Pioneer



ABOVE Dr. Friedland with UNC residency alum Dr. Millicent Winfrey-Peterseim (Class of 1992)

Mid 2025, Emeritus Professor of Ophthalmology **Beth R. Friedland, MD**, retired from 40+ years of clinical practice. At UNC, across the region and in her field, Dr. Friedland was an esteemed physician scientist, exceptional educator and leader of integrated academic-private practice.

In 1984, Dr. Friedland founded Park Ophthalmology (Raleigh, NC) and joined UNC Ophthalmology as an adjunct teaching faculty. When her thriving practice was absorbed into UNC Eye's regional network in 2020, UNC Park Ophthalmology became a driver of UNC Ophthalmology's regional outpatient growth, and she shifted exclusively to academia.

Dr. Friedland's pre-medical school research fellowship (glaucoma and corneal) studying institutional versus private practice ocular surgery comparative outcomes at the esteemed Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (Miami, FL) shaped her path as a physician scientist. Her expertise grew significantly as a National Research Service Award post-doctoral fellow (University of FL) studying ocular surface optimization, dry eye pharmacology, toxicology of the eye and ocular pharmacology.

Dr. Friedland's exceptional career in patient care, education and research has earned her multiple honors. In 2022, she was nominated as one of 15 leading female physicians nationwide for the Women in White Coats Heroes award. In 2023, she was

inducted into the UNC School of Medicine's Academy of Educators. Over 10+ years, she was repeatedly named to the Consumer Research Council of America's list of "America's Top Ophthalmologists."

Leaving physician practice, Dr. Friedland now serves as UNC Ophthalmology's Director of Clinical Trials. Her wide-ranging research studying disease, physiology, pharmacology and comparative outcomes strengthens the department's clinical trials growth and translational studies in ophthalmic treatment and therapeutics.

Dr. Friedland reflected: "I'm leading development of protocols, proposals and resources that grow our involvement in sponsored Phase 1-4 clinical trials, such as serving as UNC's Principal Investigator in a large-scale, multi-center Ocular Herpes Zoster longitudinal study. I'm excited to collaborate with UNC Public Health and Pharmacy colleagues in designing comparative lower vertebrate studies that inform our understanding of glaucoma and retinal circulation."

UNC Kittner Eye Center Ophthalmic Manager **Jackie Cunningham, COT, OSC**, noted: "I've been fortunate to work alongside Dr. Beth Friedland for years. Her dedication to her patients is impactful and lasting."

UNC Ophthalmology Chair **Don Budenz MD, MPH**, reflected: "Dr. Friedland has been a pillar of the Triangle's eyecare community for over 35 years. Although she will be missed by her patients and colleagues, we look forward to her next-stage contributions to the department's teaching and research missions as Professor Emeritus."



ABOVE 2025 Clinical Research team (L to R): Research Assistant Morgan Mac; Associate Clinical Research Coordinator Amber Wren, COA, OCS; Professor Emeritus / Clinical Trials Director Beth Friedland, MD; Clinical Research Specialist Eliza DuBose, MPH



DR. DONALD

L. BUDENZ

Excellence With Heart

The same year that Kittner Family Distinguished Professor of Ophthalmology Donald L. Budenz, MD, MPH became the Department of Ophthalmology's third Chair, his successor — Interim Chair David Fleischman, MD, MS, FACS (November 2025—) — began his residency at UNC.

To Dr. Fleischman, Dr. Budenz was an exceptional mentor who guided him through clinical mastery and preparing for independent practice. Joining faculty post-fellowship, Dr. Fleischman's mentor became a colleague in expertise (glaucoma), department leadership and a friend.

Dr. Fleischman reflected: "In many ways, I grew up as a physician while he was shaping the department. I'm grateful that my earliest surgical training and professional identity formed under his leadership. I've always admired Dr. Budenz's quiet steadiness, his integrity, and his ability to make difficult things look effortless."

In 2011, Dr. Budenz arrived at UNC after 17 years at the nation's #1-ranked Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (University of Miami School of Medicine). At this world-renowned eye institute, he trained as a glaucoma fellow, rose in rank to Professor of Ophthalmology, and led population-based epidemiological studies as an emerging physician scientist.

Charles Eifrig, MD, FACS, a comprehensive eye specialist and son of UNC Ophthalmology's first Chair David Eifrig, MD (1977–2000), met Dr. Budenz as a Bascom Palmer resident.

Dr. Eifrig noted: "In clinic, Dr. Budenz always modeled compassionate, thoughtful care for patients. My classmates

and I were very fond of him and incredibly fortunate to have him as a mentor. He was kind and generous in every interaction, and his patient guidance in the OR helped us become adept at performing cataract and other surgeries.

"When I entered practice and he became a friend and colleague, Dr. Budenz's invitations to lectures and residency education programs at UNC reflected both his professional generosity and personal thoughtfulness. I am forever grateful that he went out of his way to include me."

Taking the Chair's helm in a leading public institution, Dr. Budenz set UNC Ophthalmology on a path to physical expansion, resource enrichment and interdisciplinary collaboration. In his first 24 months as Chair, he achieved major strides in core areas of academic medicine — patient care, education and research — where growth is essential to thrive.

In 2013 alone, Dr. Budenz created the department's flagship clinic through shuttling UNC Kittner Eye Center out of the maxxed ambulatory care center to a 26K-square-foot, two-floor space in an easily accessible facility. He led the effort to secure a North Carolina Eye Bank \$1M gift that established the shared, multi-disciplinary surgical skills "Miracles in Sight" lab that enables UNC Ophthalmology, Neurosurgery and Otolaryngology learners to practice and master surgical techniques prior to performing live surgery. Dr. Budenz was instrumental in founding the Carolina Eye Research Institute (CERI) that built a collaborative, inter-disciplinary network of translational researchers driving discoveries in developing therapies and treatments for ocular disease. In recruiting UNC Gene Therapy Center's Dr. Matt Hirsch to CERI, Dr. Budenz began a research collaboration that has produced groundbreaking discoveries advancing engineering AAV vector therapies for treating hereditary degenerative ocular diseases.

At UNC, Dr. Budenz was tapped widely for leadership service that drove institutional and organizational decision-making. He led and served on working groups such as UNC School of Medicine's Faculty Practice

Committee and Dean's Advisory Committee. In the field, he served as Association of University Professors in Ophthalmology (AUPO) President (2023–2024), American Glaucoma Society President (2020–2021) and Vice President (2019–2020), among posts in other major organizations.

While at UNC, Dr. Budenz's career honors from leading eye specialist societies reflected his excellence both professionally and personally. Among them: 1) American Academy of Ophthalmology 'Life Achievement Award' (2022) / 'Outstanding Humanitarian Service Award' (2015); 2) North Carolina Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons 'Leadership in Ophthalmology Award' (2016); 3) American Glaucoma Society – 'Presidents Award' (2020), 'Humanitarian Award' (2014).

After 14 years, clear markers that Dr. Budenz enriched UNC Ophthalmology immensely under his leadership include growth in the department's physical footprint, educational resources, case volume, and scholarly output. Less defined among the expectations set for a Chair to exceed, however, his commitment to service has shone in all areas he has touched while at UNC. Dr. Budenz's long-standing partnership with Tema Christian Eye Center (Ghana, Africa) has enabled department and University faculty, learners and researchers to participate in ongoing clinical learning, teaching and investigative opportunities in a highly under-resourced nation with the world's highest incidence of glaucoma. As a rarity among leaders who oversee distribution of sliding scale care, he stood fast by UNC Ophthalmology's unwavering mission to provide medical and surgical eye care to all, regardless of ability to pay.

As Dr. Budenz returns to the esteemed institution that shaped his career, his legacy at UNC is one of effective leadership, making change in the field, and most indisputably, excellence with heart. Dr. Fleischman concluded:

"Watching him guide UNC Ophthalmology over 10+ years of change has been one of the privileges of my time in the department."

In many ways, I grew up as a physician while he was shaping the department. I'm grateful that my earliest surgical training and professional identity formed under his leadership. I've always admired Dr. Budenz's quiet steadiness, his integrity, and his ability to make difficult things look effortless.

**DAVID FLEISCHMAN, MD, MS, FACS
STERLING A. BARRETT DISTINGUISHED ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF OPHTHALMOLOGY**

UNC Ophthalmology's PGY1 Interns (Class of 2029)

“Why UNC Ophthalmology?”



Aana Amin, MD

University of California-Davis School of Medicine

UNC Ophthalmology stood out to me because of its strong clinical training and the genuinely welcoming atmosphere. I loved how hands-on the program was, from the resident [teaching] clinic, to serving Fayetteville VA Medical Center patients, to learning at [Miracles in Sight], one of the largest wet labs in the country. Knowing UNC is a state hospital with a commitment to caring for the underserved really aligned with my own values. During interviews, everyone was so friendly and down-to-earth. The residents clearly enjoy what they are doing and faculty care about getting to know you. It just felt like the right place to learn and grow!



Ishani Kapoor, MD

Drexel University College of Medicine

As a North Carolina native, I deeply value UNC Ophthalmology's dedication to providing eye care and education to a diverse patient population. Our residency program supports these values through encouraging residents to build long-term relationships with patients within a supportive, collaborative environment. From my first impressions of the residency experience on rotation to my early months as an intern, I've remained confident that UNC Ophthalmology's rigorous clinical and surgical training is the most assured path to becoming a skilled, thoughtful ophthalmologist."



Shwetha Mudalegundi, MD

Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

The camaraderie and trust that I saw early on between residents, fellows, faculty, and the entire care team remains unwavering and has characterized my own interactions with UNC Ophthalmology members. Our program's culture is one that makes it comfortable to learn, grow, and develop clinical and surgical skills, even as early as our intern year. I am proud to be a part of a program that is committed to excellence in all aspects, from patient care to research, diversity, equity, service, and leadership."



Erik Rosas, MD

Augusta University

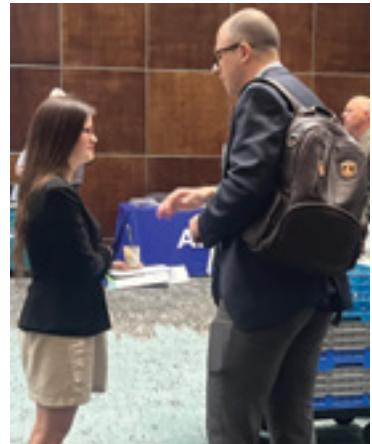
During my MS4 away rotation at UNC Ophthalmology, what stood out most was how capable and competent the residents were. Seeing how they managed a wide range of pathology with confidence while treating patients with respect and compassion left a strong impression on me. I also appreciated the diversity of the patient population and the chance to build hands-on skills in the wet lab. By the end of the rotation, it was clear this was the kind of environment I wanted to train in to become the ophthalmologist I've always hoped to be."

UNC Eye Symposium 2025



On April 12, 2025, UNC Ophthalmology faculty, trainees, ophthalmic techs and imaging specialists joined eye care professionals from across the Southeast at the daylong 2025 UNC EYE Symposium in Chapel Hill, NC. Every year, this highly regarded annual forum brings UNC Ophthalmology faculty, distinguished guest speakers and ophthalmic APPs together to share knowledge-to-practice medical and surgical approaches to comprehensive eye care and treating ocular conditions.

In 1963, the UNC EYE Symposium was instituted as an annual staff meeting of the UNC Department of Ophthalmology. At the point the event drew a wider range of eye care professionals, it was restructured as a CME conference to meet the scholarly and professional enrichment needs of ophthalmologists, optometrists, technicians and other eye care professionals.



UNC EYE SYMPOSIUM



Saturday, April 25, 2026 at
The William and Ida Friday Center
for Continuing Education

SAVE
the DATE
2026

TOP (L to R): Education sessions for: 1) Physicians (MDs / ODs); and 2) Certified Ophthalmic Technicians (COTs) **BOTTOM** (Clockwise): 1) COT lecture session led by Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology Sinthu Ranjan, MD (Cornea/External Disease); 2) Bryce DeChamplain, MD (Class of 2026 Resident) & Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology Rodolfo Bonatti, MD (Glaucoma); 3) 2025 UNC Eye Symposium Exhibit Hall; and 4) Professor of Ophthalmology Jan Ulrich, MD (Vitreoretinal Surgery / Retinal Disease), Ophthalmic Manager Jackie Cunningham, COT, OSC, and Associate Professor of Ophthalmology Alice Zhang, MD.

Leadership Transition



**Donald L.
Budenz, MD, MPH**
Chair
(2011-2025)



**David L.
Fleischman, MD, FACS**
Interim Chair
(2025-Present)

In November 2025, UNC Ophthalmology's Chair and Kittner Family Distinguished Professor of Ophthalmology **Donald L. Budenz, MD, MPH**, concluded his 14 years as department Chair. Dr. Budenz returns to the University of Miami's esteemed Bascom Palmer Eye Institute to rejoin faculty and serve in leadership. Effective November 1st, 2025, (former) Vice Chair and Sterling A. Barrett Distinguished Associate Professor of Ophthalmology **David Fleischman, MD, MS, FACS**, was appointed as the Department's Interim Chair.

Dr. Budenz joined UNC Ophthalmology in fall 2011 after 17 years of joint appointment to the University of Miami's Departments of Ophthalmology, Epidemiology, and Public Health. At UNC, Dr. Budenz served as an extraordinary leader, mentor, and advocate for patients, faculty colleagues, learners, staff and the community as a whole. His commitment to excellence has elevated the department's clinical, research, and educational missions.

During residency (2011–2014) at UNC Ophthalmology, Dr. Fleischman received the Senior Resident Surgical Excellence Award. As a Duke Eye Center Glaucoma fellow (2014–2015), he was one of 20 fellows nationwide to receive prestigious Heed Ocular Foundation Fellowship, awarded annually to a distinguished group of ophthalmologists in training for excellence.

Dr. Fleischman continues to serve as UNC Ophthalmology's Glaucoma Fellowship Program Director and Ocular Trauma Director. He is actively involved in research, with particular interests in the role of cerebrospinal fluid pressure in glaucoma and the optimization of surgical techniques for the treatment of glaucoma.

Dr. Budenz reflected: "Dr. Fleischman has shown exemplary leadership ability while serving as the department's Vice Chair, Director of Ocular Trauma, Director of the Glaucoma Fellowship, and Perioperative Director at UNC Hillsborough Hospital. I have no doubts he will excel in this new leadership role."

New Faculty



Kyra Dorgeloh, OD
Comprehensive Eye Care
Optometry
August 2025



David Belyea, MD, MBA, FAAO, FACS
Comprehensive Eye Care
September 2025



Aaron Lindeke-Myers, MD
Comprehensive Eye Care
September 2025



New faculty are listed under the UNC Ophthalmology specialty eye care division to which they are appointed. Visit UNC Ophthalmology's A-Z Clinical Faculty page (scan QR code) for detailed information on our areas of expertise and backgrounds.

UNC Health Eye Care at Cary Expands UNC Ophthalmology's Triangle-Area Outpatient Services

In early September 2025, UNC Ophthalmology opened the doors of **UNC Health Eye Care at Cary**, the department's newest outpatient location in central North Carolina. Our team of comprehensive and subspecialty eye care physicians staffed at UNC Health Eye Care at Cary includes:

- **Jon Brisley, MD / Aaron Lindeke-Myers, MD** (Comprehensive Ophthalmology)
- **Kyra Dorgeloh, OD, FAAO** (Optometry)
- **Rodolfo Bonatti, MD**
- **David Belyea, MD, MBA, FAAO, FACS** (Glaucoma)
- **Marlee Silverstein, MD** (Pediatric Ophthalmology)
- **Beatrice Brewington, MD** (Retina)
- **Gabriella Szatmary, MD, PhD**
- **Christopher Morais, MD** (Neuro-Ophthalmology).

Our range of services at **UNC Health Eye Care at Cary** includes:

- **Pediatric Eye Care:** Strabismus (eye misalignment), amblyopia (reduced vision in one eye), blocked tear ducts, and other vision problems in children
- **Glaucoma:** High eye pressure, optic nerve damage, and related vision loss
- **Cataracts & General Eye Care:** Cataract diagnosis and surgery, routine eye exams, and common eye conditions
- **Retina Conditions:** Diabetic eye disease, macular degeneration, retinal tears, and other retinal disorders
- **Neuro-Ophthalmology:** Double vision, optic nerve disorders, and vision problems caused by neurological conditions
- **Vision Care/Optometry:** Glasses and contact lens prescriptions, routine vision screenings

UNC Health Eye Care at Cary offers free parking and is located at **HealthPark at Kildaire** (15 Kildaire Park Drive, Suite 101 / Cary, NC 27518). For appointments, call **984-974-2020**. UNC Health's newest clinic works with both primary care providers (PCPs) and community eye care practices to help patients understand the best options for care.





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Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7040

UNC
HEALTHSM

UNC Ophthalmology Locations

UNC Kittner Eye Center
2226 Nelson Highway, Suite 200
Chapel Hill, NC 27517
Appts: 984-974-2020

Alamance Eye Center
1016 Kirkpatrick Rd
Burlington, NC 27215
Appts: 336-228-0254

UNC Health Eye Care at Cary
HealthPark at Kildaire
115 Kildaire Park Drive, Suite 101
Cary, NC 27518
Appts: 984-974-2020

UNC Specialty Care at Pittsboro
75 Freedom Parkway
Pittsboro, NC 27312
Appts: 984-215-3220



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