

Devotion to international education provides heart and soul of work.

Glaucoma specialist

Francisco E. Fantes, M.D.



When Francisco E. Fantes, M.D. trained as a resident at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute and later as a fellow in glaucoma research, he wasn't intending to stay. Fantes was simply trying to get as much training as possible before returning to Venezuela where he planned to work as an independent practitioner.

After training at Bascom Palmer, Fantes completed a two-year fellowship in cornea at Emory University. There he conducted extensive research on the excimer laser, publishing several studies, including a classic paper in the field.

"At the time, there was a theory that new lasers could excise tissue with no damage and reshape the cornea with minimal scarring," explains Fantes. "Our purpose was to convert an industrial laser into something that could be applied to people and to prove that it could be done."

Following his training in the States, Fantes returned to Venezuela, where he worked for four years in private practice and voluntary teaching. Then he began to think about how he could have the greatest influence in his field of practice. "I realized my vision to teach and have international influence would be better achieved at Bascom Palmer," says Fantes. "Empowering others with what you have learned is extremely powerful."

A professor of clinical ophthalmology, Fantes joined the faculty of Bascom Palmer in 1995. Shortly after his return to Bascom Palmer, Fantes was named co-director of the Bascom Palmer Inter-American Course (Curso), a widely regarded educational course for practicing ophthalmologists from Latin America and the Caribbean. The four-day course, held annually in Miami, is conducted in simultaneous English-Spanish translation and attracts more than 400 participants each year. In 1997, Fantes began organizing additional two-day mini courses throughout Latin America.

“When I realized there were some ophthalmologists who were not in a position to travel to Miami to participate at Curso,” says Fantes, “I organized the course in a condensed version and brought it directly to those residents.” Next year, Fantes hopes to expand Curso’s reach into Central America and take advantage of technology that will allow for interactive sessions between those doctors and Bascom Palmer’s physicians in Miami. Teaching Bascom Palmer’s glaucoma fellows and residents, as well as his colleagues in Latin America and beyond, is what he calls “the heart and soul of my daily work.”

In 2003, Fantes, along with Richard K. Parrish, II, M.D., developed a unique format for another medical education conference known as “Battle on the Beach.” Organized as a friendly debate between glaucoma specialists, the symposium allows attendees to evaluate the presentations of two teams offering different treatment options.

“People love it; it’s one team against the other for the sake of learning,” says Fantes. “Compared with normal symposiums which allow specialists to make a single presentation, the battle format sequesters 10-12 experts for a two-day period.”

In surgery and in clinic, Fantes is always teaching. “Education is what I do 100 percent of the time.” Fantes’ patients with complex glaucoma conditions, who also have cornea problems, benefit from his unique dual training.

“There is a huge population of patients who are dealing with both problems,” says Fantes. Often his patients require glaucoma surgery after a cornea transplant or a cornea transplant after one or multiple eye surgeries. Having one doctor for the two difficult, but not uncommon, problems is a significant advantage.

Fantes’ patients also benefit from his extensive research activities. As medical director of the Ophthalmic Biophysics Center at Bascom Palmer, Fantes conducts important research in the field of glaucoma and works closely with research fellows discussing the medical significance of projects under development at the center. Fantes is collaborating with center director Jean Marie Parel, Ph.D., and Leonard Pinchuk, Ph.D., the president of a private medical company, to develop a more effective glaucoma implant. Using a unique polymer called SIBS, they developed a drainage device to treat glaucoma that is now being tested in France. Trials of the device, called the Miami InnFocus Drainage Implant (MIDI), are expected to begin next year in the United States. “The results have been spectacular,” says Fantes. “The plastic is extremely biocompatible and produces no harmful effects.”

In addition to his work at Bascom Palmer, Fantes is president of the Pan-American Glaucoma Society. While his contributions to Bascom Palmer and the international ophthalmic community have been significant, Fantes is quick to give credit to the Institute. “Bascom Palmer has had a significant influence on my life. Everything I do, everything I have done, I have to give credit to my colleagues and my teachers here,” says Fantes. “This is a unique and very special family.”

Outside his professional life, Fantes says he is a “very tight family man.” He reads every day and prefers biographies or histories. He and his wife Lourdes, a school teacher in Key Biscayne, have two children in college. The eldest, Francisco Eduardo, who completed an undergraduate degree in the history of science and pre-med at Harvard University, is currently completing a master’s degree in public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He is returning this summer to continue his medical school training in the United States. Their younger son, Ignacio, is currently studying business at the University of Hartford in Connecticut.

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