Eric Nudleman, MD, PhD

On surfing, simplicity, and sensory stimulation.

AS INTERVIEWED BY AUDINA BERROCAL, MD

In one sentence, who are you?
I am a physician-scientist specializing in adult and pediatric retinal diseases at the Shiley Eye Institute of the University of California, San Diego (UCSD).

Why should we be watching you?
I am working with great people on fundamental aspects of the retinal vasculature. I think we have the potential to make a significant impact on how we treat retinal vascular diseases.

What are the most exciting things you are doing, both in and outside of your work?
Certainly the most exciting thing I get to do is take care of patients. But in addition to clinical work I have the privilege of working with Napoleone Ferrara, MD, and Richard Daneman, PhD, at UCSD, two great scientists interested in the biology of the vasculature. We are trying to identify specific molecules that are required for maintaining the integrity of the blood-retina barrier and that regulate vascular proliferation. Outside of work, I surf almost daily. For me, that is always exciting.

How do you think your contributions will affect the field of ophthalmology?
I hope that I will make meaningful contributions scientifically that will aid in the development of new therapies for retinal vascular diseases in both adults and kids. It is also extremely important to me to continually participate in clinical research, both to enhance our understanding of diseases and to test new treatments.

Anything about you, outside of ophthalmology, that is worth knowing?
I met my wife when I was 2 years old. She was my next-door neighbor.

Any hobbies or something as exciting as your career that you do?
When I’m not working or surfing, I chase my kids around. I think it is exciting to watch them grow up.

When you are done with your career and you look back, how would you like people to remember you?
I’d like to be remembered for being a good doctor, for being a valuable citizen in our field, and for helping to push the needle forward.

What word defines you?
Neurotic.

When do you do your best thinking?
Swimming laps. It is very repetitive, and there is virtually no sensory stimulation. I often come up with my best ideas in the pool.

What was the most important thing you learned during fellowship?
In retina surgery, often less is more. Michael T. Trese, MD, has said that to me many times. As a fellow at Beaumont, I heard some version of this almost every day, including these variations: “Keep it simple, stupid,” from Alan J. Ruby, MD; “There are old surgeons, and there are bold surgeons, but there are no old bold surgeons,” from George A. Williams, MD; and “Live to fight another day,” from Antonio Capone Jr, MD. I try always to keep this in mind and focus on the pathology, and I think that has certainly helped my outcomes.

Anything else we need to know about you?
My friends call me Noodle.