

Shaping the Future of Philippine Ophthalmology: Celebrating 25 Years of the Vitreo-Retina Society of the Philippines

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The integration of research and clinical practice in ophthalmology enhances innovation and patient care by combining the pursuit of knowledge with clinical expertise. This special issue reflects how this approach to clinical research has contributed to meaningful developments in the evaluation and management of retinal diseases, with the Vitreo-Retina Society of the Philippines (VRSP) playing a vital role in advancing retinal care and research in our country.

The VRSP's journey over the past 25 years reflects a commitment to excellence, innovation, and camaraderie. The society had its humble beginnings under the visionary leadership of Dr. Romeo B. Espiritu, the founding president, whose dream was to bring together the country's best retina specialists to improve patient care and foster collaboration. Dr. Espiritu, often referred to as the "Gentle Giant" of Philippine ophthalmology, was known for his meticulous surgical skills and groundbreaking research, particularly in diabetic retinopathy and retinoblastoma. His influence and leadership laid the foundation for what would become a cornerstone of ophthalmic excellence in the Philippines.¹

Dr. Espiritu's vision of organizing retina specialists was rooted not just in professional development but in building a community where collaboration and innovation could thrive. His efforts, supported by pioneers like Dr. Pearl Tamesis-Villalon and Dr. Ronald Yutangco, led to the formal establishment of the VRSP, which has since become the professional organization for vitreoretinal care and research in the country. Under Dr. Espiritu's leadership, the VRSP began shaping the landscape of vitreoretinal care, organizing workshops and training programs, and encouraging local research to adapt international innovations to the Filipino context. These early efforts set the stage for the society's growth and influence.

As ophthalmologists and members of the VRSP, we go beyond treating eye conditions; we actively push the boundaries of knowledge and strive to enhance the quality of life for individuals with vitreoretinal disorders. The ongoing integration of research and clinical expertise drives innovation, enabling advancements that were once thought unattainable. The VRSP plays a pivotal role in connecting research with clinical practice, fostering a



collaborative environment where clinicians and researchers work together to address complex retinal challenges.

I have always believed that every patient interaction provides an opportunity not only to deliver care but also to learn. Our clinical experiences expose gaps in patient care and highlight areas that may improve outcomes. The insights gained from clinical practice continually inform scientific inquiry, allowing laboratory discoveries to translate into real-world improvements in patient care. This relationship between research and clinical expertise has greatly advanced our understanding of ocular diseases and led to the development of therapeutic interventions that have preserved vision for countless patients. The VRSP has long recognized the importance of this connection, offering members platforms to present research, share best practices, and engage in meaningful collaborations that extend beyond the clinic.

Dedication to research opens doors to novel therapies, accurate diagnoses, and enhanced treatment modalities, ultimately transforming the landscape of ophthalmic care. In the words of Sir William Osler, "The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease."² Our commitment to merging research and clinical care embodies this holistic approach, addressing not only the ailment but also the individual. The VRSP has exemplified this ethos, nurturing clinician-researchers who are as dedicated to patient care as they are to scientific discovery.

This special issue of the *Philippine Journal of Ophthalmology* presents some of the best research investigations from Filipino retina specialists that highlight the ongoing integration of research and clinical practice in the Philippines. Among the featured studies is the **Local Validation of Postnatal Growth and ROP (G-ROP) Criteria and Modified G-ROP Criteria** as a screening tool for retinopathy of prematurity as well as the **Current Practices in Treating Retinopathy of Prematurity in the Philippines**, a comparison of **Retinoblastoma Cases from 2010-2015 to 2016-2020**, a case series describing the Phenotypic and Genotypic Characterization, and a case report on **Solar Retinopathy in Religious Sun Gazing**. The issue also explores the **Variability of Foveal**

Avascular Zone Measurements in Filipino healthcare workers, and the disparities in **Artificial Intelligence Algorithm Performance** in retinal fundus photography analysis in the Filipino population.

Additional contributions include studies on **Retinal Lesion Appearance in HIV Patients** using ultrawide field imaging and a **Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Intravitreal Injections** for diabetic macular edema. Articles like **Choroidal Vascularity Index in Age-Related Macular Degeneration** and **Automated Machine Learning for Referable Diabetic Retinopathy Classification** and a **Comparative Efficacy of Smartphone Imaging with 3d-Printed Adaptor versus Fundus Camera for Diabetic Retinopathy Screening** further emphasize the future of retinal care and the importance of innovative technologies. These diverse studies exemplify the VRSP membership's ongoing commitment to enhancing patient care through scientific inquiry.

The legacy of Dr. Espiritu and the pioneering members of the VRSP lives on in the society's commitment to fostering innovation, collaboration, and excellence. Their groundbreaking research and leadership have inspired Filipino retina specialists to continue advancing the field. As we celebrate this milestone, let us reflect on the role we play as clinician-researchers and members of the VRSP. By embracing both research and clinical excellence, we have the potential to address long-standing questions, shift care paradigms and improve the lives of individuals affected by retinal disorders. The integration of research and clinical practice will shape the future of ophthalmology and vitreoretinal care, ensuring that our work improves the lives of all who entrust us with their vision.

Paraphrasing one of science's most famous quotes, "Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be discovered...in the retina." Our commitment to unraveling the mysteries of the retina will not only lead to groundbreaking insights but will also shape the future of ophthalmology, bringing new vision and hope to our patients. The VRSP's legacy, built over the past 25 years, stands as a testament to this commitment, reminding us that the pursuit of excellence in both research and clinical practice is more than just a professional responsibility—it is a

promise to the future of vision care in the Philippines.

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