

# Look into my eye: Ophthalmologist has eagle's view into patients' health



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Photo Photos By Joe Hu/Town Crier  
Dr. Dan Beers employs the latest technologies and equipment, above, to gain a detailed view of the eye and beyond.  
eye can see the fluid inside the brain and so much more.

By definition alone, Peninsula Laser Eye Medical Group in Mountain View provides a microscopic morsel of the bigger picture of services that Dr. Dan Beers provides. Now in his 13th year as an ophthalmologist, Beers' ability to get a bird's-eye view into the human eye and that which lies beyond has done more for his clients than equip them with the correct prescription for eyeglasses.

In many cases, Beers has saved their lives.

Because behind those baby blues is more than a window to the soul – there's a window that affords a view of the optic nerve, which is attached to the brain – a window where the trained

“It's the only place we can see directly the arteries and the veins,” Beers said.

And while correcting people's vision with glasses or laser treatments and healing diseases of the eye are major parts of Beers' practice, seeing 40 patients each day increases the odds that he'll find something more serious than myopia, hyperopia or glaucoma.

“We see rare things fairly often,” he said.

Large lights focused on the patients' eyes, dilation-inducing drops and a three-dimensional view give ophthalmologists an edge that primary care physicians don't ordinarily have into a patient's overall health.

"With the equipment we have in the office, we have an advantage," Beers said. "There's a lot to learn looking inside (the eye)."

It's not merely the equipment that aids these specialists in diagnosing more than a need for glasses. In addition to four years of general medical school, ophthalmologists study surgery or internal medicine for a year, knowledge that helps them recognize patients who present with diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes and other health problems – even cancer.

"Ophthalmology incorporates a lot of sides (to medicine) in such a small, specific area," Beers said. "These things do interrelate."

Camille

Anne Marie Aubrespy wasn't too concerned when her daughter Camille, 16, mentioned she was having headaches and some episodes of blurred vision – Aubrespy attributed them to a virus. But when Camille complained of seeing double during her entire period of high school physical education, Aubrespy took the problem seriously and made an appointment with Beers.

"She had dramatic swelling of the optic nerve," Beers said of Camille.

Beers said there are many factors that could cause the swelling, including medicines that block the absorption of cerebral-spinal fluid, produced in the brain, into the body – the increasing fluid puts pressure on the brain, causing the optic nerve to swell.

"I was having really bad headaches, daily," Camille said. "I wasn't scared, but I was wondering what was going on."

Camille became even more concerned when, while driving, she saw two cars in front of her instead of one.

Beers encouraged Aubrespy to seek medical help for Camille to get to the bottom of the problem, which was found to be an antibiotic she was taking for acne – minocycline. After six months of taking the medication, the

medicine caused an allergic reaction in Camille.

"This was very scary for us," Aubrespy said. "(Dr. Beers) did an incredible job following up."

David

It was a routine eye exam for 50-year-old David Chang that brought him to Beers' office in July. Chang's eyesight was progressively deteriorating with each month that he delayed a regular eye exam.

Beers said the arteries and veins that intertwine behind the eye were stiff as a garden hose filled with water at high pressure – blood was leaking. Beers immediately checked Chang's blood pressure – a life-threatening 220/140.

That exposed another visit Chang had delayed for three years – a regular checkup with primary physician.

(Beers) "He told me to be sure to make an appointment," Chang said. "He called me twice. I figured it was something serious."

"His doctor was shocked," Beers said of Chang, who could have suffered a stroke or a heart attack with numbers that high.

Chang is now on blood pressure medications and the arteries and veins behind his eyes are looking better, Beers said. Chang has not missed any of his follow-up visits to the ophthalmologist.

"I wouldn't have had a clue if (Beers) hadn't found out," said Chang, who now espouses the benefits of regular checkups to his friends. "If it's an eye problem, I'll send them to Dr. Beers."

Teresa

Eleven years ago, Beers' schooling in pathology made all the difference for Los Altos Hills resident Teresa Streit. Then 39, Streit said she exercised regularly, ate all the right foods and was in good health. However, she was experiencing intermittent swelling and puffiness in her left eye, which caused comment from friends.

Streit visited her internist, who thought the irritation was due to allergies or her contact lenses and recommended a visit to an ophthalmologist. Streit ended up in Beers' office.

"She had mild lid swelling related to the lacrimal gland," Beers said of the tear-producing gland. "I did suspect it was something serious – it looked worrisome to me."

Without causing undue alarm, Beers encouraged Streit to see another specialist.

"He said, 'Hmm ... it looks like something is going on,'" Streit said of her consultation with Beers. "He was able to point me in the right direction and ensure that I didn't slough this off."

She didn't. An oncologist later diagnosed her with stage three non-Hodgkins lymphoma. The cancer had spread throughout her body, she said, including to her spleen and abdomen.

The single mother of a 7-year-old son underwent six months of chemotherapy and a regimen of other cancer-fighting drugs, that effectively slowed the incurable cancer.

"I know every day how lucky I am to be here," Streit said. "I'm very happy to be here to talk about this."

Now 50, Streit visits her oncologist regularly and just received a reminder from Beers that it's time for her annual appointment.

"I literally owe my life to him," Streit said.

Follow up

Beers said it's important for everyone to have their eyes examined by an ophthalmologist. For those at risk for diabetes, glaucoma and high blood pressure – or those who already have the conditions – the need is even greater.

"It makes sense for people to get checked out," Beers said.

Beers said he is happy helping his patients with both eyesight problems and unusual diagnoses. "That makes (ophthalmology) a lot of fun and satisfying," Beers said. Contact Mary Beth Hislop at [marybethh@latc.com](mailto:marybethh@latc.com).