



In the realm of specialty contact lenses and myopia control, Dr. Ashley Tucker fights vision loss one lens at a time

by Chow Ee-Tan

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***Dr. Ashley Tucker, director of The Contact Lens Institute of Houston, has dedicated her entire optometric career to the area of specialty contact lenses. This dynamic optometrist not only battles myopia but also teaches and uplifts students. Her secret? A touch of passion, a sprinkle of perseverance—and a whole lot of dedication.***

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**A**s if by fate, Dr. Ashley Tucker's eye care journey began right after her father was diagnosed with keratoconus, a condition that significantly affected his vision.

"I attended one of his optometry appointments when I was in college and was amazed at the compassion his doctor had for him," she shared. "My dad was undiagnosed for years. The doctor was so excited to diagnose him and offer him hard contact lenses to improve his vision."



Her father’s vision improved from 20/50 to almost 20/15 with rigid contact lenses then. And, as the saying goes, the rest is history.

“At that moment, I was instantly intrigued by optometry—specifically specialty contact lenses—and decided to pursue optometry,” continued Dr. Tucker, who initially was considering a career as an obstetrician-gynecologist.

Dr. Tucker is a first-generation college graduate from a family with a humble background who lived in a very small town in Louisiana. “My parents were not able to finish college. My dad worked his way up to the corporate office of Winn Dixie—a well-known grocery chain in the south—and my mom had a career in healthcare billing,” shared Dr. Tucker. “Their hard work allowed them to financially support both my sister and me through college, and me through optometry school, leaving us with no student loan debt.”

### Taking a leap of faith

Dr. Tucker graduated with a Bachelor of Science in microbiology with a minor in health care education, before pursuing her degree in optometry. After her residency, she stayed at the University of Houston College of Optometry as a research optometrist. However, deep inside, she knew she wanted something different for her career.

“A doctor whom I had interned with during optometry school asked me if I would be open to joining her practice. Her clinic specialized in primary care and vision therapy.

And she thought that I could add specialty contact lenses to it,” she shared. “I was nervous but took a leap of faith!”

Before long, Dr. Tucker started reaching out to local ophthalmologists to gain referrals for specialty contact lenses. Over time, she established a good reputation and gained referrals from multiple ophthalmologists and optometrists, particularly for her expertise in specialty contact lenses and myopia management.

Gradually, her schedule evolved to about 60% myopia management and specialty contact lenses.

Because of her remarkable success, she bought into the practice in 2019 and became a partner of Bellaire Family Eye Care and The Contact Lens Institute of Houston.

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“We have a vision therapy clinic, The Vision Learning Center, and a sports vision clinic, Xtreme Vision. We offer pretty much everything a patient could want under one roof,” she enthused.

The profession is constantly evolving and she feels fortunate to be at the forefront of what’s happening in the world of contact lenses. “Once I started seeing mostly specialty contact lens patients, I wanted one of our names to encompass the work that I do. That’s why I came up with the name The Contact Lens Institute of Houston,” shared Dr. Tucker.

While her passion lies in specialty contact lenses and myopia management, she also gained substantial experience in orthokeratology. Because of this, Dr. Tucker started to attract patients looking for myopia

management. The institute also has several ongoing clinical trials for myopia management, orthokeratology, and multifocal contact lenses.

### A passion for teaching

Dr. Tucker also loves teaching. In fact, she is a visiting assistant professor at the University of Houston College of Optometry, where she is the course master for the Ophthalmic Optics Laboratory.

“Teaching allows me to use a totally different side of myself—the side that likes to constantly learn and evolve,” shared the mother of two. “I love connecting with students and offering them real word examples to supplement what I am teaching them.”

Teaching also helps her become a better doctor. “And being a doctor makes me a better teacher. I am most fulfilled personally when I am in patient care, but I feel an obligation to my students and the profession to continue to teach. I feel very fortunate that I can do both,” she added.

### A staunch crusader against myopia

Dr. Tucker has also written extensively about all aspects of myopia control. According to her, the biggest challenge in myopia management is that it has not been truly accepted by patients and healthcare professionals as the standard of care.

“Instead, it is perceived as a premium service that is costly and unnecessary. My hope is that we will be able to soon just provide it to all patients easily,” she remarked.

Ultimately, the biggest hurdle for optometrists is educating parents about the importance of myopia control for their children. “Most parents have not heard of myopia control and think that since they haven’t experienced any pathology



from their myopia, they don't need to do anything different for their child. The truth is that many kids are on track to be more myopic than their parents, and we know that every diopter significantly increases the child's chance of developing pathology," Dr. Tucker explained.

"Parents do want what's best for the child, so we are obligated to make that recommendation," she said, adding that orthokeratology not only provides effective myopia control but also frees children from daytime correction.

"Many parents come in terrified about their child's progressive myopia state. Being able to tell them that we have a solution and show them year after year that we have significantly slowed their child's myopia progression is the best feeling," she continued.

According to Dr. Tucker, for patients who have been told that their vision issues are irreversible due to scars or diseases, scleral contact lenses could be the answer.

"The biggest opportunities are for presbyopic patients who have been told that they can't wear contact lenses," she said. "Once I fit them with multifocal or even monovision

contact lenses, they are almost always so excited to have contact lenses as an option again or for the first time."

**A fulfilling career**

Dr. Tucker shared a memorable moment when a patient drove all the way from Louisiana (about 250 miles from her clinic) just to give her a thank-you gift.

"She had been suffering for years with distorted and double vision that no one could find the answer for. She had done CT scans and MRIs, had numerous rounds of bloodwork, and had seen a neurologist and cardiologist. She found me through a friend's referral and based on her symptoms, I decided to do a topography and found she had an undiagnosed corneal dystrophy called epithelial basement membrane dystrophy. After fitting her in scleral lenses in each eye, she was instantly able to see normally without any doubling or distortions. She was able to regain her life back," she shared enthusiastically.

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Dr. Tucker is grateful to be able to do what she does, which is both inspiring and humbling to her.

"This is why I continue to educate myself and evolve as the profession

evolves—so I can offer my patients the very best there is," she noted. "I am not worried about competition. I just want to be the best doctor for my patients. And I will continue to grow and learn every single day for them," she concluded. 🧐



### Contributing Doctor

Dr. Ashley Tucker graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology and Cell Science in 2006, before going on to graduate from the University of Houston College of Optometry in 2010. Dr. Tucker completed a Cornea and Contact Lens Residency at the University of Houston, where she received extensive training and experience in the diagnosis and treatment of corneal diseases and complex contact lens fits. She is a partner at Bellaire Family Eye Care and The Contact Lens Institute of Houston, a private practice in Houston, Texas, where she primarily cares for patients in need of specialty contact lenses and myopia management. She is also a visiting assistant professor at the University of Houston College of Optometry, where she is the course master for the Ophthalmic Optics Laboratory. She regularly provides continuing education on the topics of anterior segment disease, specialty contact lenses, myopia management, and ophthalmic optics. Dr. Tucker is a member of the Speaker's Bureau for the Specialty Division of Bausch Lomb, a consultant for CooperVision, and a lecturer for the STAPLE (Soft Toric and Presbyopic Lens Experience) program. She also serves as the public education chair for the Scleral Lens Education Society, is a member of the advisory board for the Gas Permeable Lens Institute, serves on the AOA Contact Lens and Cornea Section, and is on the Program Committee for the Global Specialty Lens Symposium. She is also a regular columnist for Contact Lens Spectrum.

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