



Eyeconic Woman

From grit to gratitude, Dr. Tara George champions the next generation of women in ophthalmology

by Diana Truong

Following her recent participation on a panel at the inaugural Malaysia Women Ophthalmology Forum, Dr. Tara George, a specialist in uveitis and macular disease, offered invaluable advice for young women embarking on their careers in the field.

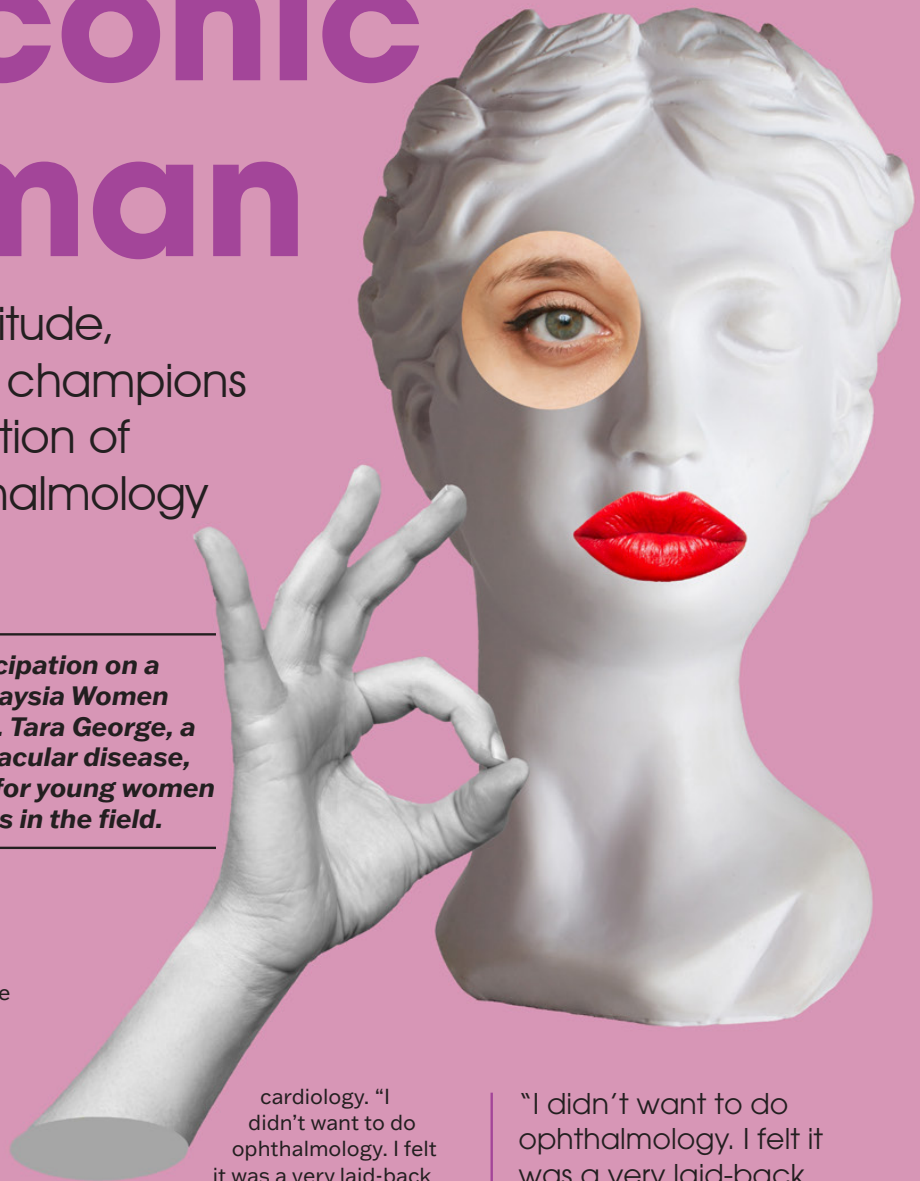
With over two decades of experience in a field often perceived as male-dominated, Dr. Tara George is committed to empowering the next generation of female ophthalmologists.

A 2023 survey by Johnson & Johnson Vision revealed that while 66% of women ophthalmologists wished for same-gender mentorship, only 26% had access to it.¹

“Encouragement is key,” shared Dr. George, highlighting the importance of offering guidance and reassurance to women navigating the challenging early years of their ophthalmology careers.

Why ophthalmology?

During medical school, Dr. George initially dismissed ophthalmology, preferring the excitement of



cardiology. “I didn’t want to do ophthalmology. I felt it was a very laid-back specialty,” she admitted.

However, upon becoming pregnant, she sought a better work-life balance. “That’s why I chose ophthalmology,” she recalled. Her experience resonates with many women in medicine who prioritize family alongside their careers.

One study indicated that work-life balance significantly influences women’s choice of medical specialty. Specifically, spending time with family emerged as the most crucial factor influencing career decisions.²

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It takes a village

Reflecting on her own journey, Dr. George stressed the crucial role of support networks for female ophthalmologists, crediting the invaluable encouragement from teachers who motivated her to pursue her subspecialty.

“Having a good support system is essential,” she advised. “My teachers

played a significant role in pushing me forward.”

Balancing career and family isn't easy, especially during her subspecialization training in London. Dr. George always emphasizes to her mentees the importance of patience and understanding from their support systems.

“It was a significant sacrifice for my husband,” she revealed, recalling the year she and her children spent in England for her training while her husband stayed home in Malaysia.

Grateful for the unwavering support, Dr. George also acknowledged her parents' contribution. “They played a crucial role in caring for my children while I dedicated hours to studying,” she reflected.

A balancing act

Dr. George urges young women ophthalmologists to advocate for flexible work arrangements, essential for balancing professional duties with family responsibilities.

She notes the shift from rigid schedules in government hospitals to more adaptable timings. “Previously, government hospitals had fixed hours,” Dr. George recalled. “But now, there's more flexibility. It's important, especially for women, as unexpected family obligations often arise.”

A Canadian study showed that, despite working similar hours

to male counterparts, female ophthalmologists spend significantly more time on childcare, with 88% opting for part-time work to accommodate parenting.³

“Flexibility is vital,” Dr. George stressed. “You may suddenly have to go to your children's school to collect a report card. And this and that. Having a supportive work environment makes it possible to juggle both career and family effectively.”

Stick with it

Dr. George also highlights the rewards of perseverance for aspiring women ophthalmologists, emphasizing the

immense satisfaction in restoring patients' vision.

Navigating the long road to ophthalmology practice is daunting. “There will be times when you feel like giving up,” Dr. George warned. “It's a reality in those difficult seven to eight years of education and training.”

She urges her mentees to look at the bigger picture. “The advice I give young female ophthalmologists is

that this tough period of studying and training is temporary,” Dr. George empathized. “But it will get better, and it gets more rewarding.”

“It's not a fast journey,” she added. “But upon completion, you're helping patients regain their vision, which is incredibly fulfilling.”

Dr. George's advocacy for women in ophthalmology illuminates the path for the next generation, offering invaluable advice and support for aspiring female professionals. Her dedication to nurturing talent and promoting work-life balance underscores the importance of mentorship and community in achieving success in the field.

Through her journey and sage advice, Dr. George champions the cause of young women navigating the challenging terrain of ophthalmology. Her vision is clear: To cultivate an environment where women can thrive, ensuring a brighter future for ophthalmology.

As she continues to inspire and guide, her impact echoes beyond her practice, shaping the landscape of women in ophthalmology for generations to come. 🌟

References

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Editor's Note

Chow Ee-Tan contributed to this story.