

# THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Joshua Robinson, MD, discusses the appeal of private practice for a former academic.

*The road that brought Joshua Robinson, MD, to private practice at Palmetto Retina Center in West Columbia, S.C. was long and winding. If given the chance, however, he says he would not change a thing. In an interview with NRMD, Dr. Robinson discusses the relative pros and cons of academia versus private practice and his path from a corporate cubicle to a surgical suite.*



**NRMD: You started out in academia, but you eventually moved to private practice. Tell us about that.**

**Joshua Robinson, MD:** I completed my ophthalmology residency at Emory Eye Center at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta Ga., and I followed that up with a vitreoretinal surgery fellowship

at Associated Retinal Consultants, which is affiliated with Beaumont Hospital, in Royal Oak, Mich. After my fellowship, I returned to Emory as assistant professor and remained there for almost 3 years, until April, when I joined Palmetto Retina Center (PRC) in West Columbia, S.C.

**NRMD: What motivated you to start your retina career in an academic environment?**

**Dr. Robinson:** It was really about wanting to work with the people at Emory. Being able to work with world-class ophthalmologists of every specialty represented an unparalleled opportunity. Also, teaching was always important to me, and I knew I wanted to continue to do that in some capacity. Additionally, the opportunity to work with such talented residents and retina fellows was extremely appealing.

**NRMD: Did you seek out private practice, or did it seek you out?**

**Dr. Robinson:** The people from PRC sought me out, and it was fortunate timing. I had not been considering leaving Emory, but, coincidentally, a close family member who happened to be located near PRC was diagnosed with a serious medical condition at that time. I accepted an interview largely because of the location of the practice, and, once I did, it became clear that it was the right move, both for my career and for my family. In hindsight, it was serendipitous.

**NRMD: Were there elements of academic practice that you did not want to leave?**

**Dr. Robinson:** My interests were primarily in teaching and in research, both of which I'm able to continue in private practice. PRC is somewhat of a hybrid practice; we have an

affiliation with the department of ophthalmology at the University of South Carolina, so I still have the opportunity to teach and to interact with residents. I was concerned that leaving Emory would also mean leaving behind complex cases, but I am still taking on complicated cases, which was a pleasant surprise. That being said, the decision to leave Emory was emotionally difficult for me. I've always viewed the Emory Eye Center as family, and it was hard to say goodbye.

**NRMD: Are there elements of academic practice that you were happy to leave behind?**

**Dr. Robinson:** The main thing I do not miss is the inertia of a large institution. A private practice setting is much more fluid and dynamic, and there seem to be fewer barriers to patient care. Another positive factor about switching to private practice is that, because there are fewer hoops to jump through, I'm able to see a greater number of patients in less time, so I have more time to enjoy with my family.

**NRMD: What drew you to the retina specialty?**

**Dr. Robinson:** I used to be an engineer. I had a wonderful position with Intel Corporation, but something didn't feel quite right. I realized I wanted to devote my efforts to helping people rather than making computer chips. I considered pure research, being a teacher, or going into medicine. I decided on medicine because it would allow me to do all three.

Before medical school, I didn't even know the difference between ophthalmology and optometry, so retina was not on my radar. In medical school, however, I became acquainted with Jonathan L. Prenner, MD, and spent several months working with him. The first time I saw him perform macular surgery, I knew that this is what I needed to do. It took 12 years from the time I left Intel to the time I finished my fellowship. It was a long and circuitous path, but I wouldn't change any part of it. ■

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