



Outstanding Young Alumnus

Robert Swan, MD '08

Robert Swan, MD '08, is associate professor of ophthalmology and visual sciences at Upstate Medical University. He is the only ophthalmologist specializing in ocular inflammation in the Central New York region, treating patients from a large swath of the state with complex conditions including uveitis, scleritis, pemphigoid, and others, many related to autoimmune disease.

Dr. Swan was raised in Queensbury, New York, in the Adirondack region, and earned an undergraduate degree from SUNY Binghamton, Phi Beta Kappa, before attending Upstate Medical University. As a medical student, he was elected to the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society and developed an interest in the field of ophthalmology. He completed internship at Bassett Medical Center in

Cooperstown, New York, and residency at Albany Medical Center in Albany, New York, where he served as chief resident in ophthalmology. After spending two years as a general ophthalmologist at Bassett Medical Center, he did fellowship training in ocular immunology at Massachusetts Eye Research and Surgery Institution, working under C. Stephen Foster, MD, a pioneer of the subspecialty and founder of the Ocular Immunology and Uveitis Foundation.

In 2015, Swan returned to Central New York to join the ophthalmology faculty of Upstate Medical University, where he quickly built a busy practice treating ocular inflammation, which often includes an element of medical mystery-solving to diagnose a rare or unusual condition. In addition to his clinical practice, Swan is direc-

tor of Upstate's Ophthalmology Residency program and serves as the Ophthalmology Department Quality Officer and EPIC Champion.

"Quality" is a theme that unites Swan's varied roles. As director of the residency program, he has focused on creating an environment and experience that makes residents the best physicians and people they can be, through mentorship and improvements at a systems level.

Among numerous initiatives, Swan introduced the use of a smartphone app to place the "institutional memory" of the department at a resident's fingertips, including orientation materials, equipment guides and procedures.

Through creation of the Erie Canal Lecture Series, Swan leveraged clinical connections between SUNY Upstate, the University at



Dr. Swan with ophthalmology residents after an educational conference

Buffalo, and Albany Medical Center to launch a joint electronic didactic vehicle that has measurably raised resident test scores.

By focusing on the electronic health record (EHR), Swan helped found the EPIC ophthalmology specialty steering board, a group of 12 ophthalmologists from 12 institutions nationwide that meets with EPIC on a monthly basis. His efforts have streamlined documentation and reduced the “click burden” for the department by almost 50 percent over the last eight years. He is currently focused on identifying and integrating social determinants of health into the EHR, both to improve resident knowledge and patient safety and outcomes. Having recently finished EPIC Physician Builder Training, he’s also working with other departments to explore and collaborate on ways to improve the EHR.

Recognizing that being a good doctor isn’t all about academic performance, Swan has incorporated emphasis on effective communication and professionalism into resident training, subjects he speaks on nationwide, including the 2022 and 2023 annual meetings of the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO), and at the inaugural TEDxUpstate in 2021.

Widely published, Swan has written online course materials related to residency education; three book chapters related to his



The Swan family at the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk in 2022



Dr. Swan speaking at a TEDxSUNYUpstate conference

specialty; and numerous journal articles covering unusual cases, often collaborations with students.

Swan serves on several national committees. He is the chair for the Committee for Resident Education through the American Academy of Ophthalmology, an elected member of the AUPO Program Directors Council, and a member of the steering committee for the regional Vision Forum and state ophthalmological society meetings. In 2018, he was awarded

both Downtown Provider of the Year and Program Director of the Year by Upstate Medical University and received the President’s Education Award in 2023.

Swan met his wife, Becca Lenhard Swan, MD '08, a breast radiologist at Upstate, during a summer anatomy course while both were medical students. The couple have three wonderful children. Swan is especially thankful for his wife’s unwavering support.