

## 2024 Aging Eye Summit Speaker Bios

**Rebecca A. Deffler, OD, PhD, FAAO**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**The Ohio State University College of Optometry**

Rebecca Deffler received her optometry degree from New England College of Optometry in Boston (2017) and completed advanced clinical training in Low Vision Rehabilitation at OSU (2017-2019). She earned her PhD in Vision Science from The Ohio State University in 2024. Dr. Deffler's research interests include interactions among vision and driving, new devices that may assist people with vision impairment, and novel care delivery models for low vision rehabilitation. She supervises fourth year optometry students in the Low Vision clinic at the College and is involved in the bioptic driving program.

**Joshua Evans, MD**  
**Clinical Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences**  
**The Ohio State University**

Dr. Joshua Evans specializes in treating glaucoma (open angle, angle closure, secondary), cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, and dry eye. After completing medical school at Wright State University, he went to University of Kentucky for ophthalmology residency and then Indiana University for glaucoma fellowship. Dr. Evans is a member of the American Glaucoma Society and the American Academy of Ophthalmology, as well as Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. In his spare time, he enjoys watching films with his wife, spending time outdoors and cheering at sporting events with his children.

**Meredith Hess, M.A.Ed**  
**Educational Resource Specialist**  
**Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences**  
**The Ohio State University**

Meredith Hess is the Educational Resource Specialist for the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at Ohio State University. She graduated from Ohio University with an Organizational Communications degree, and her career after college had her working with national associations to plan and execute their annual conferences and then time as a Catering Supervisor for the Columbus Clippers. Joining Ohio State in 2013 as a Program Coordinator, she helped with residency programs while overseeing the continuing educational events for the department. Recently, Meredith saw an opportunity to further faculty development and completed her Master's in Educational Psychology in 2021 at The Ohio State University. In her free time, Meredith teaches workout classes, enjoys hanging out with her husband, and walking her two rescue dogs.

**Irina Livshitz, MD**  
**Clinical Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences**  
**The Ohio State University**

Dr. Irina Livshitz graduated from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and then completed her ophthalmology residency at University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center. Following two fellowships (comprehensive, vitreoretinal surgery) at the Ohio State University Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, Dr. Livshitz stayed on as a faculty member as a retina specialist. In the field of retina in particular, the scope of practice is immense. She finds that in academic environment physicians often continue to innovate, both clinically and academically, regardless of how long they have practiced in the same field. Dr. Livshitz is a co-investigator in a number of different retina clinical trials, both phase II and III. In her free time, she likes to read, go ballroom dancing, hike, travelling to new places and playing with her nine-month-old son.

**Thomas Mendel, MD, PHD**

**Clinical Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences  
The Ohio State University**

Dr. Thomas Mendel completed his combination MD / PhD degrees from the University of Virginia, his ophthalmology residency at Vanderbilt Eye Institute, and his fellowships at Cole Eye Institute (vitreoretinal surgery) and University of Michigan (pediatric retina). He treats both children and adults with retinal detachment, epiretinal membranes, macular holes, macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and retinal vein occlusions. Dr. Mendel leads The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center's pediatric retina service at Nationwide Children's Hospital. In his free time, he and his wife enjoy the outdoors and going on multi-day backpacking adventures, cycling, Ohio State football and playing guitar with his two young sons.

**Zachary Mikolaj, MD**

**Clinical Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences  
The Ohio State University**

Dr. Zachary Mikolaj is a true Buckeye: completing his medical degree, ophthalmology residency and glaucoma fellowship all at The Ohio State University. He specializes in glaucoma and complicated cataracts, along with treating patients at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Dr. Mikolaj has been awarded the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences' Fellow of the Year, Makley-Battles Teaching Award, and the Paul A. Weber Award for Humanism in Ophthalmology. Outside of work, he enjoys spending time with his wife and puppy.

**Taylor Sabato, MPH, MMSc, LGC**

**Assistant Professor, Clinical  
Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences  
Department of Internal Medicine | Division of Human Genetics  
The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center**

Taylor Sabato graduated from Emory University College of Medicine with a Master of Medical Science in Human Genetics and Genetic Counseling. At Ohio State University, Taylor serves as an Ophthalmic Genetic Counselor, where she provides risk assessments for hereditary ophthalmic disease, patient education, and genetic testing as necessary. Nationally, Taylor participates in the NIH-funded expert group (ClinGen) that helps curate genetic variants for use in clinical precision medicine. Taylor is passionate about patient care and aims to empower patients living with hereditary disease through her efforts in clinic and research alike. In her free time, Taylor enjoys

playing volleyball, traveling, drinking a nice cup of coffee, and spending time outside with her husband and two Mini American Shepherds.

**Dean VanNasdale, Jr., OD, PhD**

**Associate Professor**

**The Ohio State University College of Optometry**

Dean A. VanNasdale, Jr., OD, PhD, received his Doctor of Optometry degree from the Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University in 2003 and completed a cornea and contact lens residency at Indiana University in 2004. Dr. VanNasdale received a Master of Science degree in Clinical Research and a PhD degree in Vision Science from Indiana University in 2011.

Dr. VanNasdale has a research focus in advanced retinal imaging, with an emphasis on normal aging changes and pathological changes associated with diabetic retinopathy and age-related macular degeneration. By emphasizing specific light/tissue interactions, changes to the normally well-ordered retinal structure can be emphasized. The goal of this research is to distinguish normal aging changes from those related to sight-threatening pathology and to detect retinal damage earlier in the disease process using both commercially available and laboratory-based instruments.

Dr. VanNasdale also has a research focus in population health data analysis. Using multiple, complementary datasets, Dr. VanNasdale studies associations between health determinants and vision impairment on a local, county, state, and national scale. The goal of this research is to improve insight into the underlying cause of vision impairment, identify common co-morbid conditions, and educate stakeholders on the magnitude of vision impairment. This analysis helps quantify the impact of vision impairment, identify areas where resources are needed to reduce vision impairment, and inform policy development.

Dr. VanNasdale teaches Public Health and Environmental Vision to third year optometry students and is an instructor in the Contact Lens Services at the College of Optometry.

**Fatoumata Yanoga, MD**

**Clinical Associate Professor of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences**

**The Ohio State University**

Dr. Fatoumata Yanoga is a retinal specialist and surgeon who treats diabetic eye diseases, retinal vascular disorders, macular diseases, retinal detachments, complex diabetic retinal detachments, and traumatic retinal detachments. Dr. Yanoga graduated from the University of Illinois College of Medicine, completed her ophthalmology residency at University of Chicago, and her vitreoretinal surgery fellowship at New York Eye and Ear Infirmary. She values education of future ophthalmologists and is the current vitreoretinal fellowship director for the Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences at Ohio State. Dr. Yanoga enjoys being with her husband and children in her free time.