

Department of Ophthalmology

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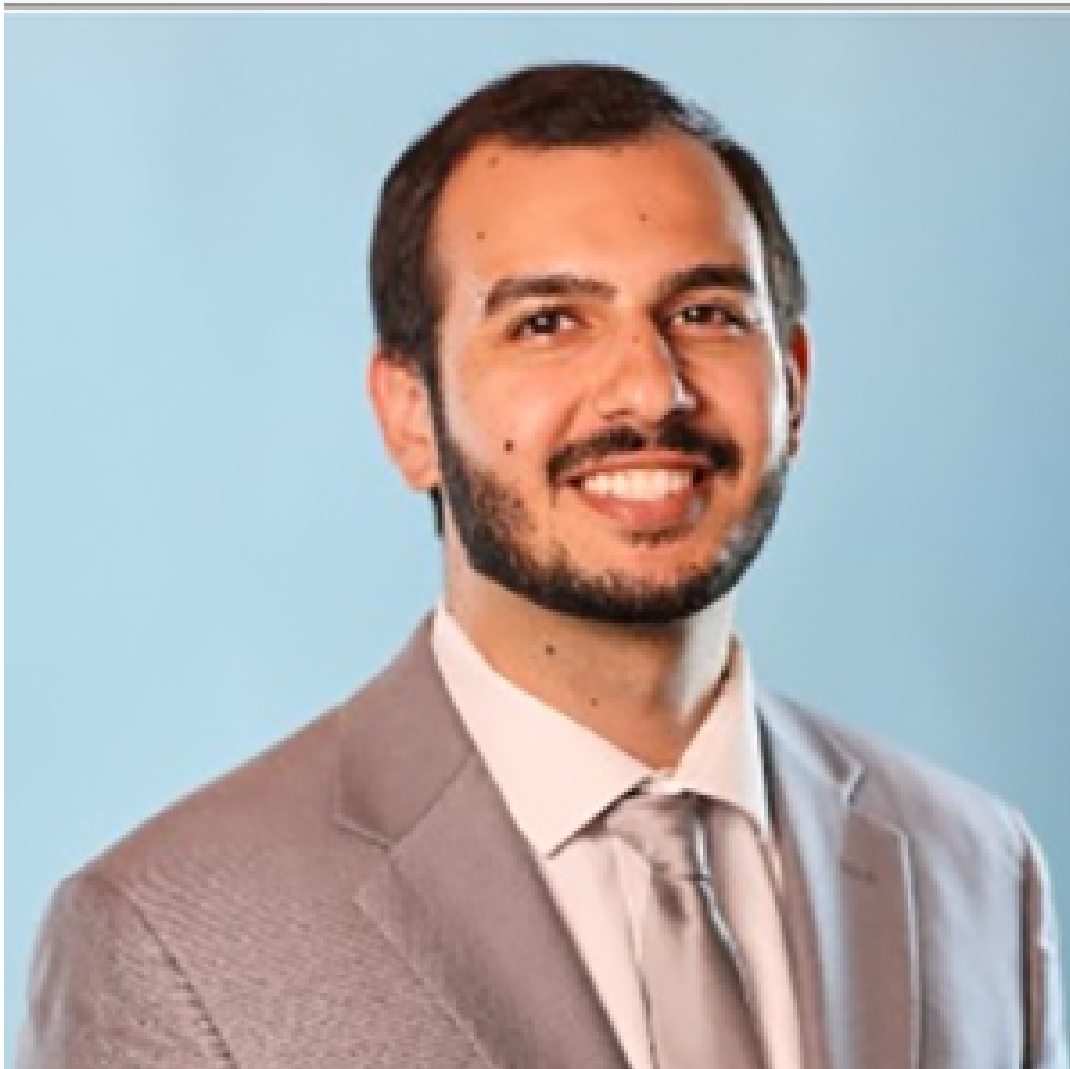
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Passion, hard work, and a little help Opens DOORS



Emory Eye Center

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The Open DOOR (Diversity and Opportunity in Ophthalmology Rotations) program is a financially supported ophthalmology rotation at the Emory Eye Center that is open to fourth-year medical students, particularly those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds or underrepresented groups. The 2024 application deadline is April 24.

Medical school students who are on the fence about applying to Emory Eye Center’s 2024 **Open** (03-18-open-door2024.html) **DOOR scholarship** (../open-door.html) would do well to heed the experience of **Cuneyt Ozkardes**, the 2023 recipient.

“Away rotations are expensive, but my [medical] school didn’t have an ophthalmology rotation. I needed the clinical experience in ophthalmology, so I applied to Open DOOR,” said the fourth-year Florida State University Medical School student.

“I thought it would be a dog fight for me to get into a program at Emory. It is such a respected medical school, with a great reputation. But sometimes people see the good in you that you didn’t see in yourself.”

In fact, there’s a lot of good to see in Cuneyt Ozkardes (“Juh-nate Oz-kar-des”). For one thing, he is very smart. In addition to receiving Emory’s 2023 Open DOOR scholarship, he is one of six medical students (out of 600+ applicants) accepted into the Emory Department of Ophthalmology 2024 residency cohort. He will begin his internship year at the Emory School of Medicine in just a few months.

Ozkardes also holds himself and his chosen profession to standards that command respect. He sees medicine as an agent of change, a means by which life’s struggles can be significantly lessened.

His own experience bears witness to just that.

A native of Turkey, Ozkardes emigrated with his family to the United States (Florida) when he was five. Raised by his mother in what he describes as extreme poverty, he was well-aware of the things that poverty denied him. One of them was access to healthcare.

“Other families, you know, when someone was sick, they might go to the doctor. We never did that. Fortunately, we were healthy, but we also had no options. It was stressful,” he said.

“I didn’t think that being poor should mean you don’t have access to health care. I was passionate about doing something about that. And with medicine, I knew I had a God-given ability, that if I worked hard enough, it was possible for me to pursue something special.”

While scholarships and Pell grants paid for his undergraduate degree, they couldn’t do anything about his MCAT scores, which failed to earn him a spot in medical school the first time around. So he went to graduate school, earned a master’s degree in biomedical sciences, and applied again. This time, success.

“I was a late bloomer,” he said. “But I had passion. And once I got into medical school, that passion helped me to blossom.”

No one will ever claim that med school is easy, but for Ozkardes, the hard work came naturally. He had been raised to expect it.

> Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) (../dei.html)

> The Open DOOR Away-Rotation (../open-door.html)

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The Open DOOR Away-Rotation

"My mother used to say all the time 'If you don't want to live like this, then get an education and work hard.' My life circumstances, my abilities in school, they all just clicked when it came to med school."

As an Open DOOR intern at Emory last year, Ozkardes was dropped into a fast-paced, high-intensity environment where his medical knowledge and clinical skills were constantly tested and sharpened. The attending physicians and senior residents were always close by to guide him, but he was hardly a spectator.

"My biggest take-away from Open DOOR was being able to observe and learn from multiple clinicians, each with a different teaching method," he said. "And it was always such a high acuity clinic that I got to practice numerous times. I learn best by doing, and I got multiple reps."

As an incoming ophthalmology resident, Ozkardes looks forward to being a part of the team that addresses the daily challenges of our busy Atlanta-based clinics. But he also has his eyes on a larger stage.

"I am very interested in Emory's work in other countries," he said. "Global ophthalmology is bringing health care to people who need it all over the world. Where there is a need, I want to be able to work there."