

*Meet
the*

CUMMINGS

FAMILY

**Arthur B. Cummings, MB ChB, FCS(SA),
MMed(Ophth), FRCS(Edin)**

Consultant Ophthalmologist,
Wellington Eye Clinic and Beacon Hospital,
Dublin, Ireland

Associate Chief Medical Editor, *CRST Europe*
abc@wellingtoneyeclinic.com

Brendan K. Cummings, MB ChB, BAO

Ophthalmology Senior House Officer,
Royal Victoria Eye & Ear Hospital,
Dublin, Ireland
brendan.cummings@ucdconnect.ie



A SPARK THAT STARTED AT HOME

**BY ARTHUR B. CUMMINGS, MB ChB, FCS(SA),
MMed(OPHTH), FRCS(EDIN)**

I became a wealthy man the day my first son was born, and wealthier again when my second son arrived. I am blessed with two wonderful young men for sons, and I am immensely proud of the adults that they have become. Since their childhoods (Figure 1), I have always said that whatever they chose for a future career would please both my wife and me as long as it was something that they were passionate about and that made them content. I rarely considered the notion that either would follow in my footsteps.

This article deals with the question: What does it mean to me that one of my sons is pursuing a career in ophthalmology?

I have had a good while to think about this, and still the words do not come easily—not because I cannot think of any words, but just because there are so many thoughts and emotions that flood my mind whenever I sit down to think this through. First, I am thrilled that Brendan has, through his own personal research, made the decision to pursue ophthalmology despite his broad interests in other disciplines (Figure 2). I am flattered, too. He must have seen something at home that made him think that this was a good career option. Perhaps it is the job satisfaction I have expressed, or my regularly bringing tales home about my work, or my always being involved in some

study or project—perhaps he has seen the excitement that accompanies such things.

Perhaps it was the displays of gratitude I have received from generous patients for having their sight restored that made him realize the difference that ophthalmologists make in people's lives on a daily basis. Perhaps he just likes the thought of helping others.

Whatever it may have been, I am grateful that it made an impact on Brendan. I am looking forward to working together with him as a colleague and to the privilege of working with my son on a daily basis. I enjoy teaching and have some professional experience to share, and I would really enjoy the process of ensuring that Brendan gains as much from this field as possible. I have no doubt that Brendan will be teaching me too, and I anticipate this eagerly.

I have a number of good friends whom I have admired from a distance, where father and son, and, in some instances, father and daughter, are colleagues. This has always appealed to me in a deep and meaningful way, and it is so satisfying now that this may become a reality for Brendan and me.

Brendan has all the typical requirements that young doctors need to get into a specialization program: He is smart, hardworking, eager to learn, and he has a great attitude. But he has some other attributes that I think are going to make ophthalmology a particularly good fit for him. He is perceptive, and, on top of that, he has great perspective. He is creative and thinks outside the box when required. He sees the obvious. He has great common sense. In a field in which everything is literally so

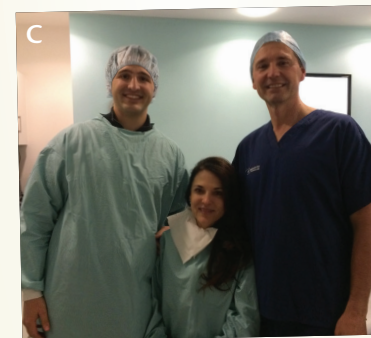


Figure 1. 1989: Brendan's christening (A). 2000: Arthur with his sons Keagan (left) and Brendan (right), watching the Euro football finals (B). 2014: Arthur (right), his wife Sandy, and Brendan (left) in the operating room after Sandy's LASIK procedure (C). 2015: Arthur (left), Brendan (center), and Brendan's wife Lu Xiao at a pub supporting South Africa's rugby team during the World Cup (D).

transparent, this is a huge advantage. He has a wide range of interests, and, fortunately, ophthalmology provides for this also: surgery, medicine, immunology, neurology, plastic surgery, stem cell applications, oncology, pediatrics—there is no other field that I am aware of with such a wide range of subspecialties within the main discipline. He has great hands, and he is thoughtful. He is calm and level-headed. This is a powerful combination for a surgeon.

He is also empathetic and kind. In general practice, this could be an all-consuming trait, driving him to really get involved in patients' lives. In ophthalmology, there is scope to practice with full conviction and still find time for family and self.

The Wellington Eye Clinic was established in 1980, and it is satisfying to know that Brendan may be part of its continuing story going forward, long after I am no longer around. He will make his own

it actually is and that you simply cannot master every aspect. The choices you have range from being a Jack of all trades, practicing across the board, to being a highly specialized grand master expert in one, or at most two, subspecialties.

The route that Brendan will choose remains to be seen, and it may not involve our working together on a daily basis if his studies and passions take him elsewhere. I know, however, that I am extremely proud and grateful that this young doctor—my son—will be in ophthalmology's service for decades to come. The future is in great hands.

THE BLINDING LIGHT OF THE SLIT LAMP

BY BRENDAN K. CUMMINGS, MB CHB, BAO

I was fortunate that my first examination by an ophthalmologist was not clinically indicated. All I remember from the first time my dad brought me to The Eye Institute in Pretoria, South Africa, was the blinding light of the slit lamp and the joy of being able to show off my knowledge of numbers when reading the Ishihara plates.

As the years passed, I eventually had the opportunity to sit on the other side of the slit lamp as a medical student in Dublin, Ireland, and I immediately realized why my dad had shone the bright light into my eyes for so long: Eyes are beautiful. They are mesmerizing when they belong to your significant other, but it can be equally easy to become lost in them while examining a patient under magnification.

Having the opportunity to gaze into one of Mother Nature's most extraordinary creations all day and get paid for it seemed quite appealing to me. Being around jubilant postoperative patients on a Saturday morning in the Wellington Eye Clinic was also one of the most compelling influences on my decision to pursue a career in ophthalmology. But, by far, the strongest influence on my choice of specialty was my dad.

My dad is one of the most passionate people I know. He absolutely loves his job. Since I was about 11 years old, the majority of conversations we have shared have centered on some aspect of ophthalmology. When I was young, my dad would present ophthalmic issues to me and see what kind of solutions I could come up with, as a way of stimulating my critical thinking. I remember being guided (with obviously leading questions) toward what I thought was inventing contact lenses, IOLs, and intrastromal corneal implants, and being so excited to receive the next problem to solve.

mark on the field and plot his course within ophthalmology. Although ophthalmology may be considered a small discipline, once you are in the field you realize how large



Figure 2. 2016: Brendan (center), his mother Sandy (left), and Arthur (right), celebrating the night that Brendan heard he had been accepted onto the ophthalmology rotation.

In the past few years, every time I see my dad I can tell that he just cannot wait to tell me about the latest procedure, trial, or idea he and his team at the Wellington Eye Clinic are working on, often at a level far beyond my grasp. The impact that growing up around happy, fulfilled parents has on a young child is impossible to measure, but I have undoubtedly been positively influenced, whether consciously or subconsciously (Figures 3 and 4).

NOTHING TO GIVE UP

Because of all the positive exposure I have had around ophthalmology—including having my LASIK done by dad—I purposefully pursued other interests within medicine in an attempt to avoid blindly going down my dad's route. I found that, besides the fact that ophthalmology was my favorite rotation during medical school, it also offered such a variety of subspecialties that it was not necessary to give up interests in oncology, immunology, or plastic surgery. The variety within ophthalmology is unrivalled in medicine.

I am obviously in the infancy of my ophthalmic career, but so far I have been blown away by how happy, friendly, and interested my senior colleagues are. From professors to fellow novices, everyone has been approachable, encouraging, and willing to teach at every opportunity. I am looking forward to many more discussions with dad, and, hopefully, one day I will know enough to fully follow what he is saying. ■



Figure 3. Arthur's most prized possession: a certificate, made by Brendan (right) and Keagan (not pictured) and presented to Arthur on Father's Day.



Figure 4. The certificate sits in Arthur's consulting room among other academic and membership certificates. It is the first and last one he sees every day arriving in the clinic and leaving for home.