Renelle Lim, MD, faced a dilemma. During residency training at State University of New York-Downstate Medical Center, Dr. Lim found herself equally drawn to two areas of ophthalmology: cancers of the eye and oculoplastic & reconstructive surgery. Instead of choosing one specialty over the other, Dr. Lim embarked on fellowship trainings in both ocular oncology and oculoplastic surgery.

Dr. Lim underwent intense training at the premier Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia. She completed two fellowships, one in oculoplastic surgery and another in ocular oncology where she studied under Carol Shields, MD, and Jerry Shields, MD, “the leading ocular tumor specialists in the world,” she said. “Their mega practice allowed me to see rare tumors.” During her 2-year tumor fellowship, she was exposed to a large number of rare tumors. While most ophthalmologists see one or two ocular tumors during their entire career, she treated several hundred patients with ocular tumors each year. “In addition to her surgical skills, Dr. Lim honed a vision for her practice through both the instruction and examples set by her mentors. One thing is to always strive for the highest quality of care,” she said.

As the new director of Smilow Cancer Hospital’s Ocular Oncology Program, Dr. Lim brings her dual specialties to provide patients with both common and rare tumors. Her program is one of the few programs in the nation with a dedicated full-time ocular oncologist in a cancer hospital. The program’s team of experts, which includes neurosurgeons, dermatologists, radiation oncologists, and others, offers comprehensive care for ocular and periocular cancers.

“Through the implementation of advanced technology and by hypofractionating, we provide unique surgical treatment options for patients with ocular tumors,” Dr. Lim said. “A prime example is plaque brachytherapy, a small disc-shaped plaque containing radioactive material that is placed on the surface of the eye to treat tumors.” Uveal melanoma—the most common primary intraocular cancer—can be treated with the plaque, which delivers radiation directly to the affected area with minimal side effects. Dr. Lim said she works closely with radiation oncologists, dermatologists, and other specialists to provide cutting-edge care to patients with ocular tumors.

In addition, Dr. Lim said, “We’re always striving to provide our patients with the highest quality of care.”
Smilow Cancer Hospital’s new Skull Base Surgery Program is designed to make these complicated treatments more smooth and effective. “These patients need a lot of care from a lot of different teams,” said R. Peter Manes, MD, FACS, Associate Professor of Surgery, whose specialty is nasal and sinus tumors. “They need lots of different appointments and lots of different imaging studies. The idea is to give patients consolidated care. They can call one number and we’ll coordinate everything and help them navigate through the system.”

“If patients can arrange to see the neurosurgeon, the ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat) surgeon, the ophthalmologist, and the endocrinologist in a single visit, that is the ideal way to deliver our expertise,” said Sacit Bulent Omay, MD, Assistant Professor of Neurosurgery, who teams up with Dr. Manes on skull base surgeries. “And post-operatively as well, because all these specialties follow up with these patients. If it’s not well organized, they will have a new appointment every week, which is very inconvenient.”

Dr. Lim’s training in oculoplastic surgery has not only enabled her to excise ocular tumors but also to reconstruct the eyelids afterward. “I am humbled to be able to provide these services to my patients,” Dr. Lim said. “Having such extensive training uniquely benefits my patients.”

Patients also benefit from genetic sequencing of tumors, which in some cases can open the door to targeted therapy for their cancer. “The future of cancer treatment is targeted therapy,” Dr. Lim explained. “We have the ability to test tumors for gene mutations and to alter treatment options based on the results.”

Genetic counselors help patients—and their families—understand the results, and the Smilow nursing staff and social workers support them throughout treatment. “At Smilow, we understand that we are not just treating the patients but their families as well,” Dr. Lim said.

As other cutting-edge cancer treatments progress through Yale’s research pipeline, Dr. Lim looks forward to adopting them for her own patients as she leads the Ocular Oncology Program in its critical mission: to conserve the life, eyes, and sight of each of her patients.

**THE SMILOW OCULAR ONCOLOGY PROGRAM DOES NOT STAND ALONE.**

A TREMENDOUS ADVANTAGE OF OUR LOCATION WITHIN SMILOW CANCER HOSPITAL IS THAT WE CAN COLLABORATE WITH MANY SPECIALISTS. I AM HUMBLED TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE THESE SERVICES TO MY PATIENTS.