

InFocus

HAAG-STREIT GROUP NEWS

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Special simulation "Spotlight" edition from the Haag-Streit Group



Welcome to "InFocus" – "Spotlight edition."

Every so often, a person comes along that not only changes the direction of their own life but blazes a trail capable of changing attitudes and inspiring others. When we met Maria Guskowska at this year's ESCRS, it was one of those moments.

In our first-ever "Spotlight" issue of your "InFocus" newsletter, I am proud to share Maria's story. Determined to master the necessary skills to perform cataract surgery, Maria set aside the traditional learning route and sought a new path.

Her ambition took her from Poland to Mexico, where she discovered the benefits of training with the Eyesi Surgical Simulator. Her journey to "surgical readiness" is truly amazing – we trust that you will be inspired to read and share her experience.

We look forward to publishing more exciting content like this, as we strive to support eye care professionals on their journey to improve vision.

I wish you an enjoyable read. Thank you for being a valued part of the Haag-Streit community.



Sharon Mills, Head of Brand,
Marcoms & Campaigns, Haag-Streit Group



The Eyesi Surgical Simulator helped Maria Guskowska prepare for the OR

Simulation: my pathway to surgical readiness

How do residents gain the skills and experience required to enter the OR? Faced with a long and demanding road with few viable surgical training opportunities, Maria Guskowska, MD, FEBO, sought an alternative where she could practice, learn, and perfect her skills without risk to patients.

Maria Guskowska's talent and interest for ophthalmology emerged early during her medical studies. After graduating, she set her sights on securing an ophthalmology residency, a highly competitive pursuit in many European countries, including Poland. With few training places available, Maria's determination led her to one of the most qualified institutes of her country, the SPKSO in Warsaw, which accepted her application. She relocated from her hometown of Gdańsk to the capital, where she immersed herself in various specialties, from cataract and glaucoma surgeries to corneal transplants and uveitis.

"Learning from the best" was a driving factor in Maria's decision to train in Warsaw, where the diverse range of procedures provided a comprehensive learning environment. However, after completing her residency, Maria encountered a new set of challenges as she pursued advanced surgical training.

The generation gap

Like many aspiring surgeons, Maria is aware

of the growing gap between those in her position and the surgeons above her.

"Those who perform surgery at a good and high level are usually around 50-60 years old. This is because a good surgeon needs experience – and this only comes in time. I'm 30 and I still need experience to reach the level I aspire to. So, there's a huge gap between us. However, the number of patients continues to rise – so experienced surgeons must operate and train the surgeons of the future. This makes learning a rocky road. It's slow, it's demanding, and you will need a lot of support."



Maria Guskowska, MD, FEBO

Structure

The unfortunate reality is that there needs to be structured surgical training – not only in Poland, but almost in the whole of Europe as well. “You can read lots of books and watch surgical videos, but you still need someone to sit by your side and teach you how to do it properly. If you’re lucky, you’ll get a patient mentor. If you don’t, you may not learn it at all.”

Of course, time and resource are not the only barriers. Many cases simply aren’t suited to inexperienced surgeons.

“We have a lot of patients in our outpatient clinics, and if there’s a 30–40-minute break, maybe you can enter the OR. But it’s not guaranteed. Many cases that we admit do not make good first steps for young ophthalmologists – they are very advanced procedures.”

Aware of these limitations that may slow down the route to surgical learning, Maria decided to seek alternatives. “I wanted to do something to make my path more efficient, to gain enough background to start with – because that’s the most difficult part.”

Simulation enters the picture

Maria underwent a two-month fellowship at [The Children’s Memorial Health Institute](#) in Warsaw during her residency. This pioneering institution had created one of the first [simulation centers](#) featuring multiple Haag-Streit [Eyesi Surgical](#) Simulators in Poland. It was here that she was able to see the possibilities of simulator training for the first time. “The Eyesi Surgical really appealed to me. The curriculum was well structured and guided me from abstract tasks to simulated operations.”



An aspiring surgeon with the Eyesi Surgical Simulator

At the same time, leading educators in ophthalmology were making waves with their new ways of learning. The most notable is [Oftalmo University](#). Based in Mexico, it offers a wealth of “blended learning” courses that teach surgical methodology and practices – with simulation at its core. Attracted to the opportunity, Maria decided to embark on a new training path.

“In my mind, I created this idea that if I go to Mexico and learn on the simulator, I will get good and strong basics before entering the OR. In this course I wanted to learn how to gain confidence, learn to have the right state of mind, and above all, a good basis,

so that when it was time to go into the OR I would have a solid foundation to start my practical surgery, obviously with the support of an experienced surgeon.”

The Oftalmo experience

Maria chose the Oftalmo course centered on the [structured curriculum](#) of the Haag-Streit Eyesi Surgical Simulator. “The training was incredible. Those two weeks brought me the best full-time, hands-on experience I could imagine. I gained a lot of valuable knowledge that I can now use in the OR on the daily basis.”

“We started our experience with some introductory lectures with Dr. Ivo Ferreira Rios M.D., and then followed with the simulator course step-by-step. Once the explanation was completed, we were encouraged to practice alone with the simulator and to work through the cases as we would normally do in the real OR. There was this great blend of real-life advice mixed with hands-on simulation.”

Safe environment

The ability to work independently, in a safe environment, was key to success.

“As aspiring surgeons, we live by first principles: do no harm. Yet without simulation, we have no real choice but to practice first cases on human beings. That didn’t sit well with me. My idea was to learn as much as possible in the safe environment and then reach for the readiness in the OR.”

“Sure, I know things won’t be perfect at the beginning. But having the freedom to continuously improve in a safe simulated environment before starting real cases is priceless. That’s what simulation gives you and what should be mandatory at the beginning in all demanding high-risk fields.”

Flexibility

The Eyesi Surgical allows users to encounter different cataract scenarios so that they present differently time after time. This has been of great benefit to Maria.

“The Eyesi offers a wide variety of tasks based around virtual patients. This is important, because when you enter the OR, you’ll never get the perfect cataract scenario. You have to be ready for as many complications as possible. Being aware of what can happen is making us more careful and lets us avoid many complications.”

What also matters is that the simulator trains users on manual skills and instrument handling. “It also features different types of phaco machines. So, you don’t have to worry what kind of machine is used in your hospital, you can try them both. Using the Eyesi Surgical Simulator, I can prepare for these different case scenarios and challenges. It doesn’t matter that the simulation doesn’t replicate the real-life exactly. What does matter is the flexibility.”

The big moment

So, did the Eyesi Surgical Simulator accelerate Maria’s journey to surgical readiness? The answer is a resounding yes.

“To be honest, I was skeptical to begin with. I wasn’t sure if what I had learned on the simulator would translate into the OR. Interestingly, the watershed moment didn’t come immediately. I just did a little bit on my first and second surgeries. The third was better, but still not perfect. Then, by the fifth, I finished it. Afterward, it felt impossible to me that someone who had never completed cataract surgery before was able to sit there and do the whole case after only doing computer simulation. It was an incredible moment.”

Mentoring

Maria has since used her skills to benefit others, attending the ESCRS 2024 as a “Super Mentor” at the Cataract Surgery Learning Lab. “I’m still learning, so I was slightly intimidated by all the people coming to use the Eyesi Surgical Simulator. However, I was able to show them things and to convey the value of simulator training, even to surgeons of superior experience.”



ESCRS

Cataract Surgery Learning Lab

Would Maria recommend her experience to others?

“Yes, absolutely. I went down the simulation route because I wanted to learn. And through my training, I can say: I’m confident to start, because as Horace once said: ‘He who has begun is halfway done, dare to know, begin,’ and from my experience, I can say that this is a great way to start.”

“The Eyesi Surgical really appealed to me. The curriculum was well structured & guided me from abstract tasks to simulated operations.”

**Maria Guskowska,
MD, FEBO**

Want to learn more about how the Eyesi Surgical Simulator can help accelerate your residency program?

Visit our [website](#) or [get in touch](#) for a demo.