

In the spotlight



Professor Morten C. Moe— looking forward without forgetting the past

Photo: Geir A. Qvale



Oftalmolog is thrilled to interview the Head of the Department of Ophthalmology at Oslo University Hospital, Professor Morten C Moe. His various leadership roles encompass patient care, education, research, and innovation. He is leading the department at an exciting time as they are about to plan their transition to the new Oslo University Hospital. The opportunities and risks adherent to this transition are part of several reasons Oftalmolog wanted to highlight Morten Moe in our portrait of excellence series this year.

Oslo University Hospital researchers explore the world to share their research. Utheim and Moe discussing future collaborations, including the potential for this feature, at the 2019 EVER Congress in Nice, France.

What are you most excited about for your role as the head of the Department of Ophthalmology at Oslo University Hospital?

I am excited to be part of a large eye department where I work alongside a dedicated, professional team. The skilled doctors, nurses, optometrists, orthoptists, and other healthcare professionals form the backbone of our department. It can sometimes be easy to take this for granted, but it is especially important in the face of outdated buildings and equipment and other challenges.

As a comprehensive department, we provide care across all subspecialties, are responsible for all national functions in ophthalmology, and have multiregional and regional functions. Additionally, our department is responsible for training medical students. I am also proud of our cutting-edge research environment. Due to the department's increased research activity, the number of individual research groups has grown from two to five during the last 10 years; we have a dedicated research floor and our own corneal bank and electroretinogram laboratory. Finally, we are soon to start planning a new eye department in the new Oslo University Hospital, focused on advanced patient care, research, and innovation. This will also be an exciting journey in the years to come.



Photo: Geir A. Qvale

Looking to the past to inspire the future. Morten Moe looks up to Professor Hjalmar August Schiøtz, an early innovator in the field of ophthalmology and the first professor of ophthalmology in Norway. Schiøtz developed the tonometer, an important tool for measuring intraocular pressure, featured on the cover of this issue.



Photo: Norges Blindforbund

Takes the cake. Morten Moe points at a surprise custom cake from the Norwegian Blind Association on World Sight Day, 2019.

What is your vision for the department regarding eye care, research, and innovation?

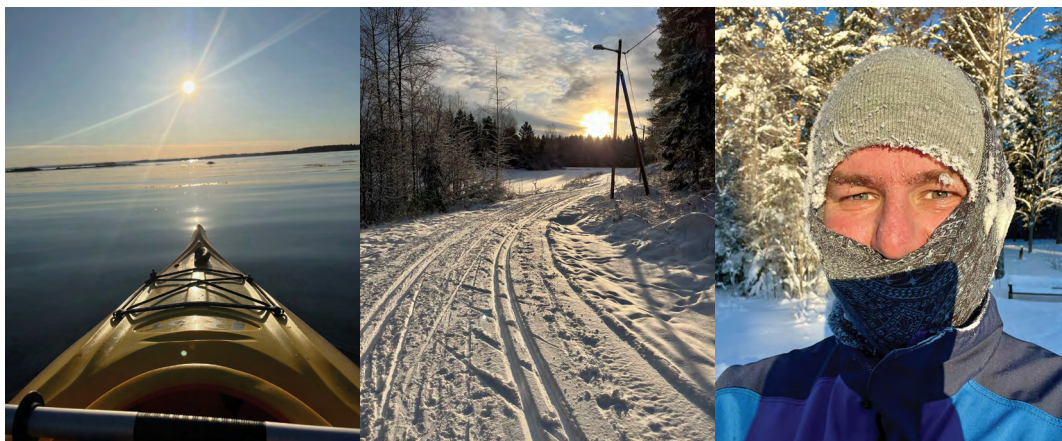
We aim to build a strong foundation for excellent public eye care, ensuring that we offer the best evidence-based treatments. Economic challenges can sometimes shift attention away from what matters most: delivering the best care to our patients. Thus, as leaders, we must remain mindful of this and keep quality of care as our central focus while still evaluating the cost-effectiveness of our treatments.

Additionally, we aim to create a positive working environment for our multidisciplinary team, fostering a setting that values the expertise of long-standing staff and attracts new talent. A key focus is making our department an attractive workplace. For example, we've successfully recruited doctors from several Nordic countries—Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland—which has been a fantastic experience (although we're still hoping to add some Finnish colleagues!).

We also strive for the department to be recognized as a reference center for ophthalmological research, focusing on both translational and clinical research. We aim to deliver high-quality research, contribute to more knowledge-based practice in ophthalmology, and translate research results into improved clinical practice. Establishing a culture that fosters and educates the next generation in both research and research-driven innovation is central to this vision.

How do you recharge your batteries with such a demanding job?

As often as possible, we like to go to our summer house, and I love not being the head when at home. I really enjoy starting my summer mornings with a refreshing kayak tour. In the wintertime, the best start to the weekend is to go cross-country skiing since we in Oslo are very lucky to have such great skiing areas within the city borders. Finally, I relax with music, whether it's smooth jazz or my hidden classics by Whitney Houston.



Enjoying Norwegian nature. Whether early-morning kayaking in the Oslo fjord during the summer or cross-country skiing in the forest in the winter, Moe enjoys the nature surrounding the city.

What does a typical day look like as the head of the eye department?

Every day begins with the morning meeting where we review new patient cases, followed by internal education taught by different doctors. From there, my schedule is usually busy and filled with various meetings, including strategic planning, operational discussions, and meetings with regional health authorities and patient organizations, but I try to maintain an open-door policy to stay accessible. I dedicate one day each week to working in the outpatient clinic to be updated on patient care. I also lecture medical students and co-supervise research projects. Finally, I like to walk around the clinic, see how things are running, and connect with people. If there's cake being served for any occasion, you can count me in—that's one of my weaknesses!

Professor Morten C. Moe:

- Head of Department, Dept. of Ophthalmology, Oslo University Hospital (2022–present)
- Division Head of Research, Division of Head, Neck and Reconstructive, Oslo University Hospital and University of Oslo (2016–2022)
- Head of Department, Dept. of Ophthalmology, Oslo University Hospital (2013–2016)
- Professor II, Institute of Clinical Medicine, University of Oslo (2012–present)
- Residence/retina consultant, Dept. of Ophthalmology, Oslo University Hospital (2005–2013)
- Postdoctoral fellowship, Dept. of Clinical Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet (2004–2005)
- PhD in neuroscience, University of Oslo (2004)
- MD, University of Oslo (2004)

At the head of the Department of Ophthalmology. Morten Moe stands in front of the eye department at Oslo University Hospital, where he collaborates with excellent colleagues who are



Photo: Geir A. Qvale

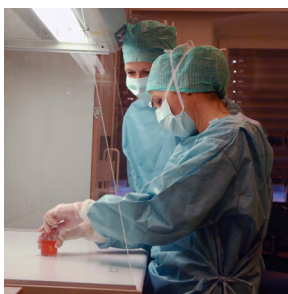
What are the most important lessons you have learned in your career so far, and what advice would you give to a new doctor or researcher early in their career?

One of the most valuable lessons I've learned is the importance of choosing a field within medicine that truly inspires you. I started my career as both a researcher and clinician in neurosurgery, which is fascinating. However, it wasn't until I met the people in this department that I truly felt at home.

A critical lesson for leaders is how important creating a collaborative and safe environment is for the department: one where we can talk with—and not about—each other, and where we can be honest and direct without discouraging each other. Without this in place, making improvements is very difficult.

It is also essential to realize that mistakes will happen at every level—your job is to create a culture with room to learn from them and minimize their numbers. Even though experiencing both success and failure is important, I have probably learned most from the latter. I remember the first time my patient developed endophthalmitis after surgery. I couldn't sleep that night; I was so worried. But I also remember how one of the most experienced doctors (who I was slightly afraid of) helped me all the way to treat the patient and to get through it. I also still remember the feeling when the patient gave me a small gift and a comforting letter when it was all done.

Finally, for those starting their careers as doctors or researchers, surround yourself with strong mentors. Establishing a positive PhD student-supervisor relationship is crucial in research, so choose your supervisors carefully!



Highlights from the Department. Moe cites the research environment and cornea bank (left), 10 operating rooms (right), and many highly skilled employees (left, right, center) as some of the keys to the department's achievements.

How did you become a leader and how have past leadership roles prepared you for your current position?

Like many other doctors in leadership positions, my path was slightly incidental. I initially led the translational research program at the department, which gave me insight into managing both people and projects. I also attended various leadership programs, which equipped me with some basic management tools. So, when the position of chair of the department became available, I saw it as an exciting challenge and decided to give it a try.

I've been fortunate to have had excellent role models in both research and clinical leadership. They taught me valuable lessons, such as patience and listening, which were not always my strong suits. A practical piece of advice I have also learned is to always leave "angry" emails as drafts overnight.

Finally, health care is a highly complex system involving people, and there are no ready-made solutions. A previous leader told me that if you manage to stay in the job for a while, you will eventually gain enough experience in handling these complex processes to a level such that you can find both rest and energy within that process. Sometimes, I need to remind myself of those words.

What do you consider most important when you are building a team?

My primary role is to select and mentor the other leaders in the department, supporting them in building their teams. The most important factor is ensuring that we have highly competent personnel, who are experts in their specific fields. As previously mentioned, our department must cover all the various subspecialties. Thus, having a mix of individuals with complementary expertise is crucial. In addition to technical expertise, I place great value on personal qualities. Team members should embody solid ethical values, demonstrate compassion, and be good role models for colleagues and younger professionals.

What do you see as the biggest opportunities and challenges in ophthalmology in the coming years?

We are privileged in ophthalmology regarding new diagnostic and therapeutic options for surgical and medical cases. This also includes recent advancements in gene therapy and artificial intelligence (AI), where our field is at the forefront. I am not afraid that digitalization and AI will take our jobs. Instead, these innovations can hopefully change how we work so that we can focus on even more meaningful tasks than comparing two images or writing long notes on the computer. That is something I am looking forward to. One of the biggest opportunities at the departmental level is developing the new Oslo University Hospital. We hope to build a department with infrastructure tailored to our specific needs and optimized patient flows.

A pressing challenge ahead is meeting the growing demand for eye care, driven by an aging population. This will require innovative solutions to manage resources efficiently without compromising patient care. At the same time, we must keep the best clinicians in the eye departments to maintain strong public eye care—these two challenges are the most critical for the coming years.

Key facts about the Department of Ophthalmology, Oslo University Hospital:

- 300 full-time positions, including 81 doctors (22 residents)
- 10 operating rooms and one refractive surgery room
- Four clean rooms, 48 examination rooms, 15 beds
- European Board of Ophthalmology–certified center



Research at the Department of Ophthalmology, Oslo University Hospital:

- Dedicated research unit with laboratory facilities, cornea bank, and electroretinogram lab
- Large patient base providing good opportunities for clinical research
- Five active research groups:
 - Clinical retinal research
 - Center for Eye Research & innovative diagnostics
 - Eye Innovation
 - Clinical anterior segment research
 - Eyetec—molecular technology in eye research
- Significant increase in the number of PhD degrees and publications: in 2013, the department published 15 papers; in 2023, this increased to 56 peer-reviewed papers



Photos: Dag S. Fosmark

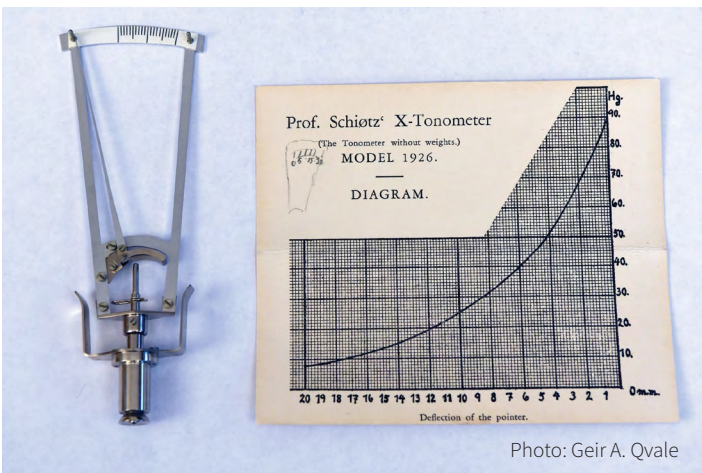


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Professor Hjalmar August Schiøtz and the tonometer:

- Hjalmar August Schiøtz (1850–1927) was a Norwegian ophthalmologist who invented the Schiøtz tonometer in 1905.
- The invention was based on the Imbert-Fick principle, which states that the pressure inside a sphere can be approximated by dividing the force needed to flatten a fixed area of the surface by the surface area of the flattened region.
- Schiøtz adapted this principle for indentation measurement by assessing the degree of indentation on the cornea when a specific weight was applied. The higher the intraocular pressure, the greater the force needed to compress the cornea.
- Schiøtz's design incorporated a plunger mechanism that moves within a hollow cylinder. The displacement of the plunger under different weights was calibrated to reflect intraocular pressure, with results displayed on a scale.
- In clinical practice, the Schiøtz tonometer requires that the patient be in a supine position.
- Schiøtz's work helped highlight the importance of intraocular pressure as the primary modifiable risk factor in glaucoma management, and his tonometer contributed significantly to early screening and treatment protocols. Schiøtz also contributed to teaching and ophthalmic research, and his work laid important groundwork in the field of eye pressure measurement.

(Adapted with information from Chat GPT)