

Cathleen McCabe MD

Top Ophthalmologist
and Humanitarian
and she can dance, too

Dr. McCabe's specialties are cataracts and LASIK. She has performed over 40,000 cataract surgeries and more than 17,000 LASIK procedures.

Castle Connolly awarded her Top Doctor - 2015, 2016 and 2017 for Ophthalmology. They also selected Dr. McCabe for the first-ever Exceptional Women In Medicine Award for 2017. This month you can see her as a celebrity dancer for the annual CANDance: Dancing with Our Stars event on October 20 at Art Ovation Hotel.





n Sundays, most physicians would be relaxing with their families, no doubt resting up for another busy week of seeing patients. Some may take a

vacation to an exotic island to “get away from it all” before going back to the busy lives they have. One doctor in Sarasota was on a beautiful island and spent her Sundays seeing patients—for free—on the island of Saint Vincent in the Caribbean.

This doctor, in fact, has been doing this for over 20 years and keeps a jam-packed schedule while there. Sundays: screen 100-250 patients; Monday-Friday: operate on as many as 80-100 patients who desperately need cataract surgery. Ophthalmologist Cathleen McCabe, MD, has been doing this charitable work for years going back to when she was practicing medicine in Indiana. She and fellow physician Eric Purdy, M.D., and with support from groups like the Lions Club of Fort Wayne, Indiana, would provide the much-needed surgery to the small and impoverished island. The island isn’t more prone to cataracts. It’s more a case of, “They don’t have a good healthcare infrastructure there,” she explains.

Since it would be a family trip, her children and husband, Dave, would be in the clinic helping patients navigate through eye exams and eyeglass fittings. Some 1,000 benefited from that alone and over 900 eyeglasses were dispensed. So it’s a meaningful family trip – a working vacation that nourishes the soul while the body doesn’t entirely get a break. But Dr. McCabe has energy to spare.

She keeps an equally busy pace here in Sarasota where she works at The Eye Associates. Case in point: on the date of this interview she drove up from Ft. Myers where her flight landed (after a visit to her daughter who is expecting her first child. This will be Dr. McCabe’s third grandchild and her first granddaughter – yes, you read that right; no it’s not a typo. She also has five children. That’s also not a typo).

So she drove to the Eye Associates’ Sarasota office to meet us after hours AND nearly drove into a nasty Florida thunderstorm, had the WCW interview, posed for our photos and then...headed off to a dance rehearsal for the annual CANDance: Dancing with Our Stars event on October 20 at Art Ovation Hotel.

Dr. McCabe’s specialties are cataracts and LASIK. If you like to choose an MD with lots of experience take note: Dr. McCabe has performed over 40,000 cataract surgeries and more than 17,000 LASIK procedures. Still, when she sees a patient there’s the occasional one who asks where the doctor is (he or she assumes she’s not the doctor...).

With Sarasota’s—shall we say—mature population it’s no wonder an ophthalmologist like her would be busy removing cataracts and getting aging eyes to see much better. But Dr. McCabe is busy also because she is a Castle Connolly Top Doctor – 2015, 2016 and 2017 for Ophthalmology. According to the Castle Connolly website, “The top doctors who are listed in our books and on this website’s directory were nominated by their peers in an extensive survey process of thousands of American doctors each year. These Top Doctors’ medical educations, training, hospital appointments, disciplinary histories - and much more - are screened by the Castle Connolly physician-led research team...Doctors do not and cannot pay to be included in any Castle Connolly Guide or online directory.”

Castle Connolly also selected Dr. McCabe for the first-ever Exceptional Women In Medicine Award for 2017. Dr. McCabe was named in the Premier

Surgeon 300 List as a Premier Surgeon innovator for refractive surgery and was in the recent past also on the Premier Surgeon 250 List as a leading innovator in premium IOL cataract surgery. She was also selected as a LaserVision Top 100 Surgeon for her experience and excellent outcomes in LASIK and refractive surgery.

According to the AAO (American Academy of Ophthalmology), 22% of its members in 2014 were women. There are more women in ophthalmology—and medicine in general—than ever before and nearly half of US medical students and residents are female. Dr. McCabe is often the only female anything in her chosen field and thus is often asked to join panels— no doubt to show diversity, but then, she is also highly skilled and sought after speaker and presenter.

The field of ophthalmology, she explains, is “pretty kind to us” meaning that unlike ObGyns there aren’t a lot of off-hours emergencies or middle of the night trips to the hospital. Her practice is mainly cataracts and Lasik. If you haven’t checked it out, cataract surgery has radically changed over the years for the MUCH better.


As she explains, you can have a cataract removed and your vision can be improved over your pre-cataract days. “Now we can make you better. Aging doesn’t mean you can’t have better vision.” What used to be done in a hospital can be done in a surgical suite at a place like the Eye Associates in ten minutes and you don’t have to go home with a big eye patch or the over-sized dark glasses. And you can even go back to work (but she recommends you nix activities like soaking in a hot tub or lifting heavy objects). It’s also bloodless.

In her reassuring way Dr. McCabe explains, “Cataracts happen to everyone. They’re happening to me,” she explains. “Lenses age,” she notes and cataracts become a problem for all of us as we age – there’s not one set age.


Dr. McCabe came to Sarasota in 2010 after spending 10 years in Fort Wayne before joining the Eye Associates. After Dr. McCabe received her medical degree from the Medical College of Wisconsin, she went on to her residency training at the prestigious Bascom Palmer Eye Institute at the University of Miami’s School of Medicine.

Her days start early – often around 7:30 a.m. if there’s surgery, but typically she sees patients until 5-6 p.m. And that means traveling between three of the Eye Associates seven offices: the original one in Bradenton, the one in Sarasota and the one in Ellenton. She’s quick to credit her husband Dave for making it all work. “I have this wonderful husband who has supported me.” He helps with the kids and covers the bases while she keep such a busy schedule.

And then there’s that “gee whiz” part of her job which makes her bright eyes even brighter. It’s when you’ve improved someone’s vision and they can see dramatically better. Even after 20 years it’s clear she enjoys it. She even enjoys the comments from patients who, after having the expert remove their cataracts say things like, “I didn’t know I painted the bathroom that color” or “My husband was a whole lot better looking [before the surgery]. He didn’t have all these wrinkles.”

Anticipating your comment: yes, she is a very busy woman. And yes, very good at what she does. Wanna bet she aces the dancing on October 20? 

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For more information on the CANDance on October 20, visit www.cancommunity-health.org/candance or call 941-366-0461 Ext. 10120