Renelle Lim, MD, faced a dilemma. During residency training at State University of New York-Downstate Medical Center, Dr. Lim faced the challenge of choosing between two specialties: ocular oncology and oculoplastic & reconstructive surgery. Instead of choosing one specialty over the other, she 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 the other in ocular oncology, under Dr. Carol Shields, MD, and Dr. Jerry Shields, MD. The leading-edge, high-volume practice in the world, the Shields practice allowed her to see rare tumor cases. During her training, she cared for over 500 patients with ocular tumors each year. “This allowed me to see tumor cases that you typically don’t see,” she said. “I was able to see rare tumor cases that not many other ophthalmologists see in a year.”

Dr. Lim honed her skills in both diagnostic and surgical practices. “One of the most valuable lessons learned from my fellowship training is to always be ready for the unexpected,” she said.

As the new director of Yale’s Ocular Oncology Program, Dr. Lim brings her dual specialties to her role in the multidisciplinary Smilow Ocular Oncology Program at Yale New Haven Hospital. The program attracts patients from all around the world and offers a range of services, from diagnosis to treatment, including radiation oncology, oculoplastic surgery, and ophthalmology.

“I feel very lucky that I have a fellowship training in ocular oncology,” Dr. Lim said. “I am able to care for patients with both common and rare tumors.”

As the new director, Dr. Lim will continue the Smilow Ocular Oncology Program’s commitment to providing the highest quality of care. The program offers state-of-the-art treatments, including plaque brachytherapy, which delivers radiation directly to the affected area with minimal side effects. Dr. Lim collaborates with radiation oncologists, plastic surgeons, and other specialists to ensure that patients receive the best care possible.

“Patients come from all over the world to receive care at the Smilow Ocular Oncology Program,” Dr. Lim said. “I am honored to be able to care for patients with rare tumor cases and provide them with the best possible outcomes.”
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.”

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Dr. Lim’s training in oculoplastics enables her to not only 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, eye, and sight of each of her patients.