

Focused but flexible

Sarah E. Coupland, MBBS, PhD, FARVO, the newly elected ARVO Board trustee for the Anatomy/Pathology (AP) Section, is professor and academic lead of pathology at the University of Liverpool and a senior pathologist at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital. Coupland is the lead pathologist in ocular oncology, which receives patients and tumor specimens from all over the world. She also heads a team of students and scientists as chair of the Liverpool Ocular Melanoma Research Group, which she established.

Her major scientific achievements include devising the first TNM staging system for ocular adnexal lymphomas, developing a novel grading system for malignancy of *in situ* conjunctival melanomas, revitalizing the European Ophthalmic Oncology Group and successfully translating molecular typing of uveal melanoma from a research tool into routine clinical practice.

In addition to being elected a trustee, Coupland has been a member of the ARVO Annual Meeting Program Committee, chair of the ARVO Awards Committee and is an ARVO Silver Fellow.

She had a brief exchange with *ARVONews* about her career and advice for young women scientists.

ARVONews: What was your inspiration for becoming a researcher in the field of ophthalmology?

Coupland: My inspiration stemmed from working with Professor William R. Lee of Glasgow, Scotland. Prof. Lee was a mentor to many people, because of his patience with students and trainees in both pathology and ophthalmology, as well as his inquisitive nature into understanding the mechanisms of eye disease. This resulted in him publishing more than 600 papers and supervising numerous PhD students. I spent an elective research period with him in 1994, and it was during this time that I made my decision to specialize in histopathology, which I commenced in Berlin, Germany in 1995, and focused on ocular pathology.

ARVONews: What are some of the highlights of your work?

Coupland: One is my research in the understanding of ocular adnexal lymphomas and intraocular lymphomas – these tumors were the

subject of my professor thesis in Germany and many of my papers in the late '90s and early 2000, and still remain one of my great interests. Another highlight is my study of molecular genetics of ocular melanoma, as evidenced by the relatively large number of papers I've written with Bertil Damato, PhD, FRCOphth, in the last seven years.

ARVONews: Tell us about the projects you are working on now.

Coupland: My research team, the Liverpool Ocular Oncology Research Group (www.loorg.org), has several interests. These include the molecular genetics of ocular cancers in tumor development and metastasis; the use of molecular techniques in diagnosis, prognostication and in the prediction of drug response; tumor proteomics; cell cultures and cancer stem cells in ocular cancers; ocular tumor models; and cell-signalling pathways, which could be potentially targeted therapeutically. We have one of the largest ocular oncology biobanks worldwide with detailed clinical annotation.

ARVONews: What words of encouragement do you have for young women scientists about moving ahead in the field?

Coupland: My advice would be to remain focused and determined but also be flexible with ideas, always thinking “outside the box,” because usually in this way you can be one step ahead in the game. Try also to be strategic and efficient with effort.

ARVONews: Would you like to share any advice to young women scientists about the issue of balancing work/family?

Coupland: It is difficult to balance both, but there are ways of juggling both spheres. This requires great organizational skills, including incorporating help from others (e.g., child caretakers and after-school clubs); good time management; stamina and being prepared to sleep less, as you often have to work either very late or very early (!); building good relationships with colleagues and having a dedicated partner with whom to balance your own personal strengths and weaknesses. ■

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ARVO is proud to introduce this regular feature to offer advice and encouragement and promote women's eye and vision research careers.