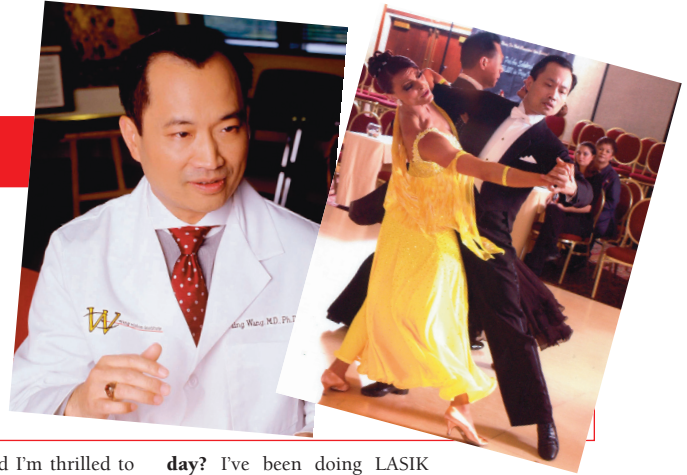


## Dr. Ming Wang

Some doctors have endless trails of degrees and titles after their names, indicators of the multiple directions a specialist can take in their given field. Dr. Ming Wang has more. At 45, Dr. Wang is a Clinical Associate Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Tennessee, an Attending Surgeon at Saint Thomas Hospital, and Director of the Wang Vision Institute ([www.wangvisioninstitute.com](http://www.wangvisioninstitute.com))—and that's not including his ballroom dancing credentials. We caught up with Nashville's busiest eye doctor recently and asked him about his work, his life and his ads. Here's what he had to say ...



**1. You've mentioned in past interviews that the business side of opening your institute was the most challenging part—as inarguably the most high-profile ophthalmologist in the city, do you think you've gotten past those initial hurdles?**

No, I'm still working on it. Even though, from a medicine and laser physics standpoint, I feel I'm well trained—MD from Harvard and M.I.T., and one of the few LASIK surgeons in the world today who holds a doctorate degree in laser physics—business is the aspect at which I've never had any formal training and continue to learn more everyday.

**2. Your ballroom dancing commercial is, if you'll pardon the pun, eye-catching. Has it brought in a lot of new business?**

Some. I feel that one lives here on earth only once, so you have to enjoy it. I love medicine, I love taking care of my patients, and I love dancing. It's fun to be different, to be yourself. It's a bit unusual for a doctor to do dancing on an ad, but it's my passion, and so my feeling is “just go for it.” Life can't be all about work and business. It can be fun, too.

**3. You were on the U.S. National Champion ballroom dancing team at Harvard—do you find many opportunities in Nashville to stay in top form?**

Yes. For the past three years, I've had the good fortune of having one of the best ballroom teachers, Ms. Shalene Ermis, who together with her husband Ben are the U.S. national professional champions. I take lessons and practice with Shalene two nights a week, and also dance another night or two a week. We are what you call a “pro-am” dancing couple—she's the professional and I'm the amateur. In the U.S. National Ballroom Championship in 2004, we became national finalists and were ranked 4th in the country in the international 10-dance.

**4. With the ability to provide services unique in the state, in the country, and in some cases in the world, what makes you stay in Nashville?**

Although in the past several years I've received job offers at several Top 10 medical schools in the country—Washington U., Emory, Stanford, etc.—I've remained in Nashville for the following reasons: First, I have a great job here with a wonderful practice, staff and patients, and I love it and won't consider leaving it. Secondly, I'm very active in community activities and believe in contributing as a member of the citizenship, and Nashville is a wonderful community with a giving spirit. Thirdly, though I love Boston, New York and Philadelphia, the weather in those places is too cold for me. Finally, I've seen changes in Nashville in the past many years, in terms of the development of more

diversity and cultural richness, and I'm thrilled to be a part of that progressive effort. In short, Nashville has wonderful and much more friendly people than in other places in the country, a caring community and an up-and-coming cultural life that is progressing and building, so this is where I want to be. To be in New York or L.A. is like adding a brick on top of a 10-story building—it makes very little difference. But to be in Nashville today is like adding a brick to a growing three- or four-story building—it's growing, exciting, and one can play a bigger role in shaping our city. Actually, the quality of life here in Nashville is superior to most other places in the country. For example, my parents, who are on the research staff at Stanford University in California, and my brother, who is on the research staff at Albert Einstein College in New York, have enjoyed Nashville very much every time they've come here. It's a secret not yet known that Nashville is a very desirable place to live.

**5. How many procedures have you performed that were firsts of their kind?**

About 20. We introduced most of the new corneal surgery technologies in recent years. We were the first in the world to perform laser artificial cornea implantation—a new surgery developed to restore vision in terminally corneal blind patients—and were also the first in the world to perform a laser Intacs ring procedure on a keratoconus graft, a treatment for this progressively blinding genetic eye disease. We introduced to our state the revolutionary LASIK technology—bladeless LASIK. To date, our patients are from over 40 states in the U.S. and from over 50 countries from around the world.

**6. What led you to devote so much time to trauma-induced blindness?**

As an eye doctor, my lifetime goal is to restore vision in terminally blind patients, those patients who've been told they have irreversible blindness due to trauma and infection. The eye is the window to the soul, and I feel that with my double doctorate training in both laser technology and medicine, combined with what I've learned from my teachers at three of the top four ophthalmologic institutes in the states, I'm in a position to help the research and development of new technologies so that we can bring these blind patients out of their dark world. I've spent nearly 20 years on this work, and have obtained a U.S. patent. To restore vision in terminally corneal blind patients is the most inspirational goal to me—hence, I've dedicated my life to it.

**7. According to your website, you've performed over 25,000 LASIK procedures during the course of your career. What does that come out to per**

**day?**

I've been doing LASIK surgery for nearly 10 years, and performed the first LASIK at Vanderbilt University when I was the head of the program there. If you average the surgeries from all the years I've been in practice, and assume 300 work days a year, it's about eight procedures or four patients a day, on average.

**8. How many patients do you see in general on a typical day?**

I don't see that many patients—about five to 15 a day—since most of the patients are referred to me with complications and need on average 2-4 hours per patient to analyze the problem and communicate with the original doctors. I perform all the surgeries myself, as requested by patients. We're one of the most active complication-referral and -management centers in the U.S. today.

**9. What percentage of your time is spent doing basic LASIK procedures versus research/new treatments, groundbreaking or otherwise?**

About 50/50. In addition to providing the best quality of care and best technology and expertise in doing bladeless LASIK surgeries, my focus is also involved in research, and I continue to help develop new technologies. We were the first eye institute in the world to perform several new eye surgeries, including the world's first laser artificial cornea implantation. I recently went to Europe and became the first surgeon from the U.S. to study a new laser technology designed specifically to repair post-LASIK complications.

**10. What exactly is a LASIK procedure?**

LASIK stands for laser-assisted in-situ keratomileusis. We have the most state-of-the-art version of LASIK technology at our center. I use a laser, instead of a blade, to create a corneal flap. I then lift it and use a second laser to shape the cornea into the proper shape of the contact lens or glasses that you'd otherwise be wearing. The flap is then repositioned back onto the cornea. After a bladeless LASIK procedure, the patient is able to return to work the next day and will see as clearly as if he/she was wearing contacts or glasses—except the patient will no longer be wearing them, of course.

**11. Are LASIK procedures to ophthalmology what Botox is to dermatology?**

Not quite. Though both are elective procedures, LASIK permanently shapes the eye so the patients can see well afterward without having to wear contacts or glasses. In contrast, Botox, offers a temporary muscle relaxation and decreases wrinkles but the patient needs to be treated every few months. We actually offer medspa services for skin rejuvenation at our practice, including Botox.

**12. How long does it take someone with recently restored vision to fully acclimate to being able to see again?** Most of our LASIK patients can return to work the very next day after surgery, though the healing and stabilization of vision can take up to three months.

**13. How does having a doctorate in laser physics help you in your work?** The biggest difference between medicine in the 21st century and the last century is that today a doctor who is trained only in traditional medicine—*anatomy, physiology, etc.*—can no longer keep up with the rapid progress of modern medicine, since very high-tech procedures and technology are involved. Obtaining my doctorate degree in laser physics prior to my MD degree at Harvard and building many lasers myself in the laboratory has made me realize that it's critical to truly understand the principles of the high-tech technology that we're using, especially when it comes to using lasers to permanently determine the quality of your vision. Today, doctors truly need to have expertise in both medicine and technology to be able to combine these two areas optimally and deliver the best quality of care to one's patients. For me, having obtained two doctorate degrees truly helps me provide the best care for my patients.

**14. How does your institute differ from others that offer similar procedures?** One, expertise. From the surgeon's training and experience standpoint, I've had the opportunity of being trained in three of the top four ophthalmologic institutes in the U.S.—MD from Harvard and M.I.T. in Boston; residency at Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia, and cornea fellowship at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami—and have obtained a doctorate degree in laser physics, thus enabling us to combine medicine and high-tech technology, which is critically important to deliver the best quality care in today's high tech world of medicine.

Two, the best technology. We've introduced most of the refractive surgery technologies to our state in recent years and were the first in the world to perform several new types of eye surgeries. Of course, high-tech medical technology can only produce the result you want when it's combined with an expert's guiding hands.

**15. Does your Chinese heritage play a big role in your life here in Nashville?** Yes. My roots are in China, but by now I've spent more of my life in the states, so I'm a Chinese-American. I participate actively in the activities of Nashville's Chinese community—I helped found the state's first Chinese-language newspaper, and currently am the president of the Chinese Cultural Club—and believe in sharing the wonders of the Chinese culture with the rest of the world. At the same time, I also believe firmly in being an upright and contributing member of the citizenship of the United States, my adopted country. I founded a sight-restoration non-profit foundation to help terminally blind patients from all over the world to come to Nashville to undergo novel eye reconstructive surgeries that we perform free of charge. Hence, I believe in being rooted in one's own culture, communicating and sharing it with the rest of the world, and contributing and helping as a citizen of America. The world today is becoming a smaller and smaller place. People of different countries, races and cultures are increasingly communicating and working together.

**16. An article on your website mentions that your first professional endeavor was as a musician playing the traditional Chinese er-hu—is that an instrument you still play?** Yes. In fact, Dolly Parton collaborated with me and I played my Chinese violin, or er-hu, in one of her songs, "The Cruel War," on her most recent CD. We believe this is perhaps the first collaboration of country music and traditional Chinese music in any major way in the music industry. My good friend Carlos, who's a classical guitarist from Puerto Rico, and I have a small band in which we play music together and support our non-profit sight restoration foundation. We call our band Music for Sight. It's interesting that many friends today comment to me that it's nice to have a hobby, but playing the er-hu started out not as a hobby at all. In the chaotic period in China called the Cultural Revolution, all youth were deported to remote provinces for a life of misery unless you had a skill that the communist government deemed useful, such as playing a musical instrument for their propaganda troops. I learned to play the er-hu at age 14 as a desperate means to survive.

**17. Does the science of ophthalmology require much creativity?** Absolutely. Since all medical specialties these days require knowledge and experience with high-tech technologies and innovations, creativity plays a much bigger role in ophthalmology. For example, we studied how to reduce corneal scarring and restore vision by "tapping the fountain of youth"—understanding how a fetus can heal without scarring—and how to help fundamentally solve the problem of human organ transplantation rejection.

**18. At the risk of being obvious, do you regard sight as the most important of the five senses?** Of course. When I started learning ophthalmology, I met a patient who was blind from birth. I asked her, "What does color mean to you? What does red mean to you? How about blue?" She said, "Red to me is something warm and fluffy, and blue is cold and slippery." She'd replaced an absence of the most important visual sense with tactile and temperature senses. Among all of our senses, when asked which one, if it's completely taken away, is the most devastating to lose, I'd say the answer is vision.

**19. Do you support any local charities?** Yes, I firmly believe in contributing, participating and being a responsible member of our society. I support many charity organizations such as the Community Foundation and many others, as well as a large number of great organizations such as Cheekwood, Nashville Ballet, Nashville Opera, NPR, etc. I've also established a non-profit sight restoration foundation so patients who come to us from around the world will be able to undergo the novel sight restoration surgeries performed by us free of charge.

**20. Between groundbreaking procedures, a thriving practice and a devotion to the fine arts, do you ever get the chance to kick back and, say, just watch a little TV?** "Kick back," what's that? I'm like the Energizer rabbit, always going and going. I rarely have time to watch TV. Typically, I work from morning to evening, then practice dance or music or go to support a charity event, and then return to work to do research late at night until early morning. It's a busy life, but an exciting one. But I've increasingly realized that I've been discriminating against today in the interest of serving tomorrow. Hence, I'm slowing down a bit and trying to enjoy more of today. Which is, itself, the life.