



Kristof Vandekerckhove, MD

ESCRS Board Candidate 2021
Founder & Medical Director at Vista Alpina Eye Clinic
President of the Tariff Committee &
Board Member of the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO)

"I am a typical ESCRS member and ready to defend our interests"

Kristof Vandekerckhove, MD, MBA, is running for the Board of the European Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgeons (ESCRS) in 2021. In this interview, he explains his passion for ophthalmic surgery, the Swiss Alps, the *learning culture* at his clinic and he shares his motivation for running for the ESCRS Board.

How did you get into ophthalmology?

After medical school in Ghent, Belgium, I first started residency in cardiology. My interest in pharmacology and clinical research then led me to the pharmaceutical industry. After 8 years, I wanted to practice medicine again and decided to train in ophthalmology, which had been one of my favourite medical specialties at university. My sister was already a happy ophthalmologist at that time and it was easy for her to pass on her passion to me.

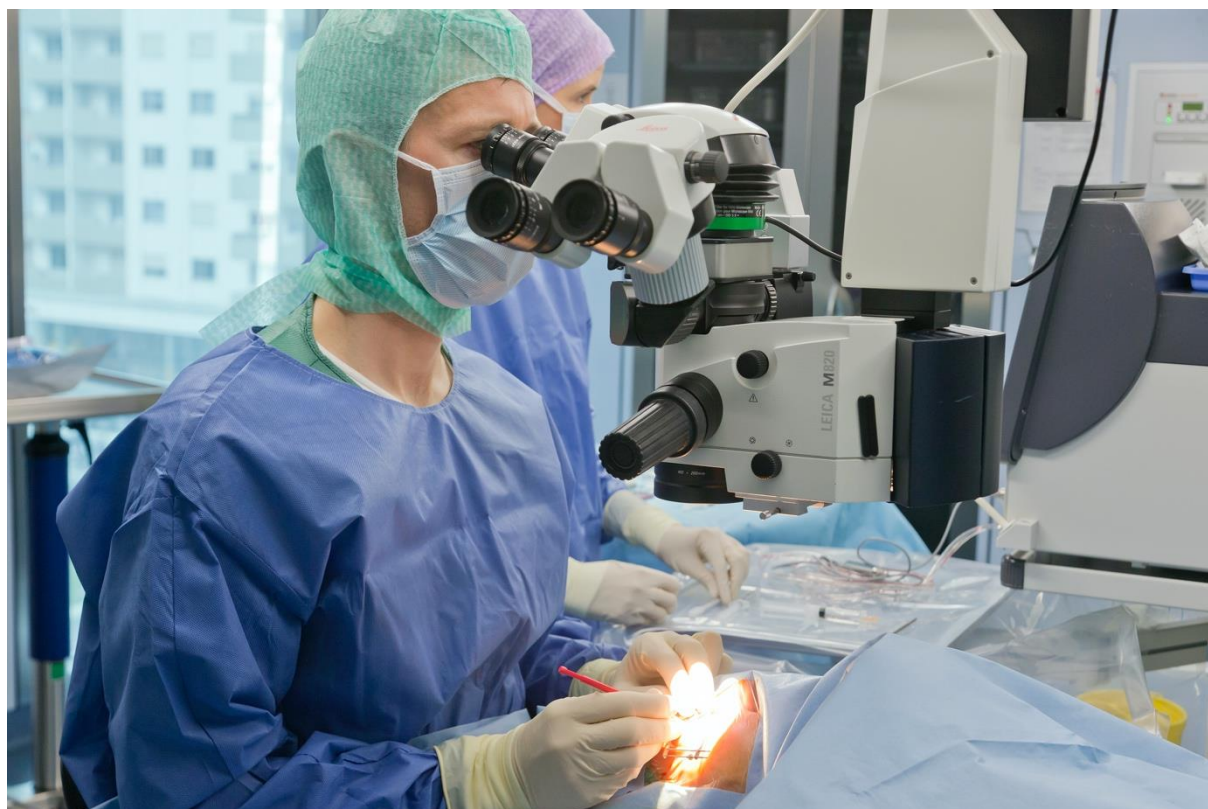
Can you elaborate on that?

I was impressed early on by how, in ophthalmology, a short surgical procedure can significantly improve patients' quality of life. For example, cataract patients can be sustainably helped by implanting an IOL in less than fifteen minutes. To a large extent, this is due to the fast-paced innovation that is taking place in ophthalmology, which will allow us to help even more patients in the future. This is the kind of *tangible* innovation that has always fascinated me. What impressed me then, I still find exciting and motivating today. Nothing has changed in that respect, quite on the contrary.



Kristof Vandekerckhove, MD

ESCRS Board Candidate 2021
Founder & Medical Director at Vista Alpina Eye Clinic
President of the Tariff Committee &
Board Member of the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO)



In 2008, you founded the Vista Alpina Eye Clinic, which today treats patients at several locations in the Swiss canton of Valais. Why did you decide to found your own clinic?

In line with what I saw at home as a child, I have always had an entrepreneurial mindset and always wanted to be an entrepreneur. Didn't want to become director of a big company, though, but preferred to build something small from scratch. Ophthalmology offers a lot of possibilities in this respect. Even as an independent ophthalmic surgeon you can make a big difference and help countless patients, since most procedures can be performed on an outpatient basis and without a large hospital infrastructure.

What is your main focus at Vista Alpina Eye Clinic?

Our mission is to provide the very best patient care using state of the art technology, techniques and a 'human touch'. Everything we do and invest in should directly result in added value for the patient. We definitely prefer to invest in the latest innovative device rather than in designer chairs for the waiting room. We also actively live a *learning culture*. I would like everybody in our clinic, whatever their job, to learn at least one new thing every single day. This is the only way we can continue to improve and offer our patients the full spectrum of ophthalmology in the highest possible quality.

Kristof Vandekerckhove, MD

ESCRS Board Candidate 2021
Founder & Medical Director at Vista Alpina Eye Clinic
President of the Tariff Committee &
Board Member of the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO)

Last year, you performed over 2000 surgical procedures. What's your favourite way to relax after a long day in the operating room?

As a former mountaineer, I love outdoor sports. That was one of the reasons why I settled in the Swiss canton of Valais. I love being in the mountains, with my family, with friends or even alone.



How can you possibly perform 30-40 surgeries a day? Does the evening patient get the same quality as the morning patient?

Absolutely. In fact, I know highly respected colleagues who treat even more patients per day. It is all about passion and having the right mindset. A key factor, though, is my positive and well-coordinated team. Our procedures in the OR are very smooth with very little friction or interruption to our 'flow'. We change the entire OR team at lunchtime, so I can start with a 'fresh' team after lunch. Of course, it is physically and mentally demanding. You need to be healthy and fit, and I firmly believe that a rigorous physical training programme also helps to tackle marathon days in the OR.



Kristof Vandekerckhove, MD

ESCRS Board Candidate 2021
Founder & Medical Director at Vista Alpina Eye Clinic
President of the Tariff Committee &
Board Member of the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO)

Since 2018, you have been President of the Tariff Committee and a member of the Board of the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO). How did that come about?

In 2018, there was a major revision of outpatient tariffs in Switzerland, which hit ophthalmologists particularly hard and massively endangered patients' quality of care. The Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO) therefore set up a Task Force to find solutions to counter these rapid tariff erosions together with the Society's Tariff Committee. I fought for better tariffs in the Task Force before being elected president of the Tariff Committee by the members of the SSO in the summer of 2018. Because of the great importance of tariff negotiations for ophthalmologists in Switzerland, I became a member of the SSO Board at the same time.

What were the main challenges for the Task Force and the Tariff Committee?

One of the biggest challenges and achievements was certainly the introduction of flat rates. After countless meetings and negotiation rounds, we succeeded to arrange flat rates directly with all the major insurance companies in Switzerland for most surgical procedures. These flat rates are fair for both patients and ophthalmologists, make billing work easier and indirectly promote the quality of treatment – flat fees mean: pay for performance, not for complications or inefficient structures. Ophthalmology is still the only discipline in Switzerland that has rolled out flat rates on such a large scale.

Why are you running for the board of the ESCRS?

I'm an experienced surgeon with a strong interest in clinical research, particularly in the field of refractive cataract surgery and phakic lenses. I have been a member of the ESCRS for almost 10 years now and I am extremely thankful for what I have learned at the annual meetings and through the interaction with passionate ESCRS members from around the globe. I have benefited greatly from these experiences throughout my career and I would love to give something back to the ESCRS. And of course working for and in the ESCRS means being at the very forefront of innovation, what an exciting thought that is!

What exactly attracts you to clinical research?

I have always been particularly attracted to research that has an immediate and practical impact on patients and physicians. For example, in clinical studies with toric lenses, I came across the finding that remarkably similar lenses [can behave completely differently](#)¹. And that minor changes to a lens can dramatically alter its properties, to the benefit of the patient. I have [published my findings here](#). In 2014, I was so happy to receive the "Best Presentation Award" at the ESCRS Congress for my work on improving toric IOL design and [increasing rotational stability](#)²!

¹ <https://journals.healio.com/doi/pdf/10.3928/1081597X-20171211-01>

² [https://www.linkedin.com/in/kristof-vandekerckhove/detail/overlay-view/urn:li:fsd_profileTreasuryMedia:\(ACoAACyHknsBHa7O0tAs1tpoMgnTe8uiM9mqCCY,1635454934117\)/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kristof-vandekerckhove/detail/overlay-view/urn:li:fsd_profileTreasuryMedia:(ACoAACyHknsBHa7O0tAs1tpoMgnTe8uiM9mqCCY,1635454934117)/)

Kristof Vandekerckhove, MD

ESCRS Board Candidate 2021
Founder & Medical Director at Vista Alpina Eye Clinic
President of the Tariff Committee &
Board Member of the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO)

What are you working on right now?

Right now, my main interest is in the [latest generation of extended-depth-of-focus \(EDOF\) lenses](#)³. This is another very promising avenue in refractive cataract surgery. At the same time, companies seem to be hyperactive and every few months a new "next-generation" EDOF lens comes to the market without much clinical data and with little to no publications. They all claim similar optical properties and clinical benefits, but the evidence is thin. This is where motivated ophthalmologists from around the world can step in and "fill the void" with data from their own clinical studies and/or experience.



Is it correct that you conducted a short survey to find out where your focus should be as a future board member?

Yes, that is correct. I conducted a mini-survey among ESCRS members. Clinical guidelines came first, followed by member advocacy and services like the ESCRS secretariat, website, video library and patient information. Surprisingly 'quality and scope of ESCRS congresses' came last. This might be due to the fact that the quality of the congresses is already extremely high. I will be happy to work on guidelines and member advocacy & services if elected!

³ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/next-generation-edof-lenses-choice-yours-kristof-vandekerckhove-md/?trackingId=IccUaUoORISsKPRs704hTw%3D%3D>



Kristof Vandekerckhove, MD

ESCRS Board Candidate 2021
Founder & Medical Director at Vista Alpina Eye Clinic
President of the Tariff Committee &
Board Member of the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO)

Why should ESCRS members vote for you?

In many ways, I am a typical ESCRS member and I would therefore represent them very well. I know the challenges that ophthalmic surgeons face on a daily basis from my own experience. I am an experienced board member of the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology (SSO), and as their president of the Tariff Committee I have been advocating for the interests of the Swiss ophthalmologists. I am hardworking, multilingual and ready to defend our common interests. I promise I won't let the ESCRS members down!