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*Dr. PremNandhini Satgunam*



Dr. Satgunam made many Ohio State Optometry memories outside of the classroom. Pictured from left to right, **Vidhya Subramanian (BSOpt, MS’04, PhD’09)**, Dr. Satgunam, and Mallory Fogt, daughter of **Nick (OD/MS/92, PhD’96)** and **Jenny Fogt (OD’99, MS)**, at the Fogt home circa 2007

India, Dr. Satgunam and her colleagues had just two days to prepare for the lockdown after it was announced by India’s prime minister.

“We didn’t have a lot of time to plan,” she explained. “There was a lot of panic.”

The team rose to the challenge, adapting quickly. The hospital was shut down, with the exception of emergency eye care during the initial lockdown, and didactic classes shifted to an online format. Teleconsultations were offered to help non-emergency patients. Researchers pitched in by testing, implementing, and analyzing teleoptometry options, and Dr. Satgunam plans to share the results of this work in an upcoming journal article.

Now that the hospital is open at 80 percent capacity, coursework continues to be delivered online, while clinical education is in person.

“Because we had a very good hospital with a very good base, our institution stood strong,” she said. “Here, the leadership nourishes the relationships between researchers and clinicians, and optometrists and ophthalmologists, all in the best interest of patients. It’s a great model.”

Dr. Satgunam credits her Ohio State education for reinforcing her sense of purpose, which has guided her throughout not only the pandemic, but her entire career.

## **The Journey to Ohio State**

After earning her degree in optometry from the Elite School of Optometry in India, Dr. Satgunam moved to Ohio specifically for Ohio State’s Graduate Program in Vision Science. Her research interests aligned with those of **Nick Fogt (OD/MS’92, PhD’96)**, who became her master’s and PhD advisor. Another perk: a classmate from her undergraduate program, **Veena Adusumilli (MS’03)**, was enrolled in the Vision Science graduate program.

She fondly remembers her days at Ohio State. “Dr. Fogt is an extremely good human being, a very down-to-earth person,” she said. “I learned quite a bit from him. In India, we are so used to calling somebody to fix things for us, but after coming to the U.S., the first culture shock I had was that people will do their own repair work. They know how to drill and saw and all that,” she laughed. “So Dr. Fogt, beyond optometry, taught me how to operate machines.”

As Dr. Fogt’s advisee, Dr. Satgunam found herself motivated by his encouragement and support. She said, “I think working with him really brings out the best in you. He gives you the space to do your own thinking. He wouldn’t push his ideas on us. I don’t think very many people operate that way, especially these days. If you have a grant and you’re already focused on one particular topic, it becomes a very strict focus area. The fun of science, of exploring, is lost.”

Some of Dr. Satgunam’s favorite Ohio State memories include access to inspirational speakers, fantastic library facilities, the Jimmy John’s “Number Six” sandwich, and the college’s genuinely warm, good-natured faculty.