

Editorial ► Our Human Family

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A few months ago, after having been a clinical associate for 35 years, and after serving on the board of The Optometric Extension Program Foundation for 15 years, I became the 12th president of the OEPE. The past few months have been a time of both reflection and excitement.

In the almost 80 years of optometric history since the OEPE was founded in 1928, there have been many changes in both medicine and optometry, yet many things remain the same. In 1933, Saul Lesser, the author of many of the “Black Books” on optometric examination and prescribing, talked of sudden and radical changes in optometric practice and the difficulty of keeping pace. That situation seems to have continued to the present day.

The Optometric Extension Program came into being in order to provide postgraduate education to optometrists so that optometrists would have access to the best possible understanding of the use of lenses, prisms, and filters in conjunction with visual training to improve the visual health of each individual patient. That, too, continues to be the case.

A. M. Skeffington traveled throughout the United States on a train. That was the birth of the Regional Clinical Seminar or RCS program that continues to be an important aspect of OEPE’s clinically based education. Now there are more instructors, most of our travel is by plane, and we have added many new clinical associates outside North America. The behavioral philosophy of optometry has become truly international. In the last year, OEPE, in conjunction with local chairs, has offered RCS-style programs and our comprehensive Clinical Curriculum courses across the world, serving optometrists from 6 of the 7 continents.

Another longstanding tradition is the publication of the “OEP Papers.” From the very early days of the foundation, these papers were sent out to our clinical associates to support their continued education. The monthly papers continued through the eighties until the *Journal of Behavioral Optometry* was born, with its first issue in 1990. In that issue, Irwin Suchoff, the editor-in-chief, recognized the need for this new publication, saying, “The profession has been changing and continues to do so at a rapid rate.” The need for professional education and support had not changed between 1933 and 1990, and I don’t believe it will as long as optometry remains a vital independent profession.

JBO served the profession well for many years, until we said goodbye to JBO in 2013, ending a 17-year run in order to join in the production of a new publication, *Optometry and Visual Performance*. OVP is a collaborative effort of the Australasian College of Behavioural Optometry and the Optometric Extension Program Foundation. The mission of OVP is to increase the awareness and availability of clinically

relevant information in functional, developmental, behavioral, and vision therapy aspects of optometry through an internet-based, open-access format. OVP is truly international, now being enjoyed by readers in over 60 countries with contributors from 12 countries.

With the passing of the monthly papers, clinical associates gained access to another benefit. About four times per year, clinical associates receive a book or video recording of significance. For example, recent offerings include *Vision Therapy: Success Stories From Around the World* from Pam Schnell and Marc Taub and *Crossed & Lazy Eyes* by Pilar Vergara.

OEPE’s mission remains very much the same as it was in the beginning. We remain dedicated to gathering and sharing information about the visual process. What has changed is the size of our audience. Our cadre of clinical associates in the U.S. is growing, and the behavioral philosophy of optometric care has grown to where there is now an international consortium of behavioral optometric organizations who support each other, sharing resources, expertise, and enthusiasm. A highlight is the International Congress of Behavioral Optometry held every four years, with attendees from throughout the world. ICBO VIII will be held in Sydney in April of 2018.

Another significant addition to the audience is the number of optometric students who are taking an active part. OEPE has provided speakers for optometric students in 5 countries including 18 schools in the U.S. and Canada. There are more than 1500 optometric students who are clinical associates of OEPE, supporting the mission with youth and enthusiasm, growing and working towards the day when they will take their places as optometrists in practice, as educators, and as speakers; students are an important part of our future and are the young leaders of our profession.

Where does each of us fit in? As president of the foundation, I am honored to be asked to do that job, but I hold that job as a clinical associate who is part of OEPE. I believe in and support the educational mission of OEPE because I know firsthand what optometry has to offer through behavioral vision care. My life was changed because I was the beneficiary of optometric care. Each clinical associate shares in every program and every success of the OEP Foundation. As a clinical associate, there are direct benefits, such as reduced costs for education and the quarterly publications mentioned above, but the most important benefit is being an active part of the good work being done by the foundation. We, as clinical associates, each play our individual roles, and together, we make our profession better. We are all better equipped to help change the lives of our patients and live more fulfilling lives ourselves through our collective efforts.

A friend shared Maya Angelou's poem, "Human Family," with me. Maya Angelou, through her poem, expresses much of what I have experienced as an optometrist, teaching and representing OEPP throughout the world, meeting many optometrists and therapists at home in their own countries, and having met still others from places to where I will probably only dream about traveling.

*...I've sailed upon the seven seas
and stopped in every land,
I've seen the wonders of the world
not yet one common man.*

*...I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.*

*We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.*

OEPP is not simply a board of directors and a staff. OEPP is a family of dedicated clinical associates serving the optometric family through learning and education throughout the world. We, as optometrists, are not all the same. We have diverse needs, personalities, and locations, but we share a

common interest and common concern for the visual welfare of our patients. Our foundation board reflects that diversity, with members from three countries with diverse cultural heritage and experience.

I hope you each will join with me in what has become a life's work, that of welcoming each willing person to the family and supporting their efforts to enjoy the profession of optometry in the best manner they can for as long as they will. Some may want to be identified with a label or achievement, some by where they live, or others by an organization or philosophy they hold dear. We not only want to welcome those choices; we want to affirm them. In the past year, we had the opportunity to take part in meetings with ACBO, BABO, BOAF, COVT&R, COMOF, and SIODEC (members of the ICBO consortium) and to be represented at NORA and COVD as well.

We want to live in fellowship and family, one with the other, and we invite all who will to join with us in building the international optometric family. I believe that a primary key to making this ideal vision possible is the best possible education. OEPP has been around providing and supporting optometric education for nearly 80 years, and we are pretty good at it, through the combined efforts of all our clinical associates. We want to be better still.

Please share your ideas with us. Please let us know how you want to participate and how we can help.