

Essay ► InfantSEE® Scholarship, 2016 2nd Place Winner

Kalie McCartin, Pennsylvania College of Optometry

Long before I was a student at Pennsylvania College of Optometry, I was working and expanding on my leadership skills. In my undergraduate work, I co-founded the optometry club, ran the meetings, and organized fundraisers. I believe that in order to be able to provide exceptional care, you have to have a practice that is run efficiently and is equipped with everything that your patients could need. Building on my leadership skills will help me be a better employer, but it will also help cultivate a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere in my office that will allow for better patient care. As a student, I volunteered my time to take part in several vision screenings and get hands-on experience working with children. This allowed me to work with their parents and go over the different screening techniques. As an InfantSEE® provider, I believe it is equally important that you are able to make the children feel comfortable so they can enjoy their exam. It is also crucial to communicate with the parents what you are finding and what can be done if needed.

My clinical experience has allowed me to work on and improve my skills in both of the qualities listed above by providing me with early hands-on experience in our pediatrics department. I have taken part in several pediatric exams and was able to start watching how doctors interact with patients and parents. I am now educating parents and finding new ways of explaining our findings and treatment options. My clinical experience includes great hands-on opportunities in vision therapy. In my practice, I plan on carrying over many techniques that I have been learning, improving exam efficiency and identifying problems when children arrive. I find that what I have learned works well in educating parents about their child's findings. I believe that as



we educate parents, word of mouth can play a very big role in raising awareness about vision disorders that can be identified very early in children.

I believe that a major problem that we are facing right now is the simple lack of public awareness of how important it is to have children's eyes examined early. I believe it is certainly an obstacle that we need to overcome; I also believe that with the technology that we have at our fingertips and social media that it shouldn't be much of a challenge to overcome. Eliminating the current lack of awareness of these problems would be a drastic improvement and shift in the statistics that show how many children have undiagnosed and untreated visual problems.

I believe that the most effective method of marketing the importance of infant vision at this point is through the use of social media. We have seen how social media has raised awareness for countless causes in extremely efficient ways. I believe that it is long past time that we started utilizing this technology for our cause. As an optometrist, I plan on continuing what I have already started when it comes to promoting the InfantSEE® program. In the last year, I started a nonprofit organization with the goal of educating the public about the impact that vision problems can have on a child's academic success. My foundation plans to raise

awareness in several ways. The first is through the use of several social media outlets such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Another way that I plan to promote the InfantSEE® program is by making sure it is mentioned at every educational dinner that we are currently working to organize for grade school teachers at various schools. I hope to eventually have these dinners held by optometrists across the country with the focus not on optometry but on educating the public and teachers so that they can keep the conversation of the importance of vision ongoing and educate parents. Other projects that my organization is planning are field trips for grade school children to visit optometry schools across the country. Through directly educating children about our field and what we are able to provide in terms of diagnosis and treatment,

I believe that we can make sure the next generation is more informed and thus able to get their children screened sooner. I firmly believe that with increased social awareness we can change the statistics and decrease the percentage of children who fall through the cracks and unnecessarily suffer from their very treatable vision problems.

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