

President's Insights January 2026 Transcript

Vicki Weiss- President: Well, I'm excited to have Dr. Tracy Matchinski with us tonight.

She is a Past President of VOSH/International and a low vision diplomat of the American Academy of Optometry. She's also an associate professor of optometry and coordinator of low vision at the Illinois College of Optometry, and she works with the Chicago Lighthouse.

She's the World Council of Optometry Low Vision Representative to the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, and she has published and lectured both nationally and internationally on low-vision rehabilitation.

Recently, the Illinois College of Optometry appointed Dr. Matchinski as the inaugural Rosenbloom Family Professorship in Low Vision Rehabilitation. Welcome, Dr. Matchinski.

Tracy Matchinski-Faculty Adviser SVOSH-ICO: Thank you very much.

Vicki Weiss: Our first question I have for you tonight was, based on your experience, U.S. and abroad, how is low vision developing, and what else is needed to reach patients who need this support?

Tracy Matchinski: So that's a good question. There is so much need. There are millions of people worldwide that are visually impaired and blind. So, as the profession of optometry develops, which we know is a challenge globally, the specialty areas within optometry also need to develop. So, specialty contact lenses, pediatrics, low vision, all of these things, and certainly low vision rehabilitation

This is something that's very much needed, given, you know, the statistics that we're facing in terms of people that are visually impaired. It needs to be incorporated into the optometric curriculum worldwide, which is a challenge because just creating those schools, having the right faculty and trainers to help distribute and train graduating optometrists is a big challenge, but it's something that we can all work on.

Vicki Weiss: Thank you so much. We're going into... February is Low Vision Awareness Month, so that's part of the reason why we chose to have this discussion right now.

Another question for you I have is, is there a way to partner with more SVOSH international school chapters? We did partner with SVOSH-UTM, the optometry program at Universidad Tecnica de Manabi in Ecuador.

Any you can think of in particular.

Tracy Matchinski: That is an amazing way to help...

People learn more about specialty clinics such as low vision. So, what I would say is if you are going on a VOSH trip, work really hard to target an SVOSH chapter internationally to work with.

And what that brings is that your clinic can work with the local optometry, and then you can also bring skills, extra skills. So typically, you know, just in

the...recent history, just working in places like India, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, I have worked directly with SVOSH chapters on the international clinics that we set up, and we ask the local optometry and SVOSH chapter, what do you need?

So, how it would work is that you just communicate with them in advance, so their students work with you, and on these trips, in addition to doing, for myself, the specialty of low vision, we also typically

Have a special couple hours of lecture or a hands-on workshop to help enhance their skills in providing care to this population.

And it's, you know, basic examination techniques, building on what their currently faculty... is teaching them, also talking to them about the care of this patient population and resources that you can provide. You know, certainly when you're going on a clinic trip.

Again, I would highly recommend that you partner with local optometry, and especially local SVOSH chapters,

you know, some of the resources, for example, that I typically bring on these trips, we do clinical care, but also the educational component, because they're hungry to learn more, and who doesn't like to listen to guest lectures, right? We love our own faculty, but we also love to hear from others.

So typically, when we do a VOSH clinic, partnered with local optometry, you know, some of the things we'll bring are high plus and minus glasses.

You know, more and more we're fabricating new glasses for people, but, you know, if you have a minus 20 or a plus 20 in your chair, it's so amazing to be able to give them something to tie them over till the glasses come in.

Also. You know, so we bring a little bit of a library of high plus and minus. We bring a lot of high plus readers. You know, just giving the plus 5, the plus 6, the plus 7, and watching, you know, the working distances being shorter, can do amazing things.

A bag of plus 10 and plus 20 handheld magnifiers. We also have been bringing a lot more orientation mobility, the white cane, which has been interesting. That's not something I've always done before, but unfortunately, people will come to the clinics, having already lost their vision, so it's just a measure of independence.

And a great resource for that is www.youcanegive.org.

They help supply free canes and solar-powered audio players that people can take on trips, you know, around the world.

Another thing that we do, is we have, like, a fact sheet on any apps and accessibility features that I can talk for a few more minutes, if that's okay, that might be translated into the local language. So, it used to be that it's all about the lenses and magnification, and it's still a lot about that, and providing a good refraction.

But there are so many apps.

And accessibility features for enlargement, contrast enhancement, and speech. Just a few quick ones. Seeing AI, it has over 35 languages. It's the OCR optical character recognition, simple app on almost any smartphone that can help read things to patients.

something called Be My Eyes, bemyeyes.com, which we're probably all familiar with, available in over 150 countries, 180 languages.

there's an app called SuperVision+, which has a magnifier, but it also has speech, and in, it can also be Supervision goggles in even an inexpensive cardboard VR headset can provide enhanced distance vision. And just knowing a little bit about computer and phone accessibility options is a big deal. Another really big resource for people is NVDA, Non-Visual Desktop Access.

www.nvaccess.org. This is two young men, in New Zealand who are blind, created a free screen reading program, and I've seen people around the world be able to sit at computers and have a free screen reader, which is amazing.

You know, and on top of all of that, just a really good refraction is so important, so to be able to provide that.

Vicki Weiss: Thank you so much, Tracy. That's a lot of great resources. So, we really appreciate all that.

That's really special. And then I guess, what can VOSH do to encourage more optometrists to work in low vision?

Tracy Matchinski: That's a great question. I think the heart of a VOSHer wants to help people. We all do. But when you see things that are not fixable by glasses, you know, just having a little bit of knowledge, you know, some of the resources I was talking about.

You can really see what an impact your skills as an optometrist makes.

I'm just going to give, like, two quick examples. I had a man not so long ago, we were in Morocco, and he had congenital cataracts, surgical aphakia, so he walked around with nothing, no correction for years and years and years, and he was probably in his mid-20s, so, I had my stock of aphakia glasses, you know, just having a small selection. He was, I don't know, plus 16 with a plus 3 add, and...I put the glasses on, and this man danced around the clinic, and it was so impactful, and it was a simple refraction. Obviously, it didn't get him to 20-20 vision, but it made such a humongous difference. So, really just anybody on VOSH trips knowing how to provide a good refraction, and thinking a little bit about the optics with a few magnifiers, high-plus readers, and more

And more just the accessibility and the apps that you can tell patients about.

Vicki Weiss: That's really amazing, Tracy, how just even our simple, basic things that we learned long ago in optometry school can be put to such great use

I think we forget that sometimes, it's like, minus 6, or whatever, here's your glasses, but you forget what a difference.

Tracy Matchinski: being able to help provide the best vision makes for a patient, for a person, to help them interact in their communities, to be employed, to participate in education. It is such a big deal, and kind of like our superpower as optometrists, so I would encourage everybody to use it, and I think, really, just being on a clinic trip, whether it's in your own community or internationally, being able to help people can really spur you to learn a little bit more about any subspecialty, especially vision rehab.

It's kind of not that hard to prescribe the magnifiers or let people know about the apps or the accessibility features that are available to enhance their lives.

Vicki Weiss: and I love how we can share and learn from each other on the clinics, so I think that's... a really exciting part of what we're able to do with low vision, so I really appreciate that.

Well, Tracy, thank you so much. I really appreciate you doing this with us tonight, and you have a great evening, and we'll see you again soon.