

President's Insights October 2021

I would like to start my first President's Insights by thanking everyone who volunteers their time, knowledge and expertise to keep VOSH/International focused on its goal of providing the gift of vision and eye health to people worldwide. Our current and past Board members for their strategic guidance. Our committee chairs and members for implementing projects they are passionate about. The executive committee for ensuring that we get to the core of issues so that we can confidently make important decisions and everyone else who helps with planning and implementation.

We couldn't accomplish any of our goals without the dedication of our domestic and international VOSH and SVOSH chapters and all of our volunteers. The support of long-term partners such as Optometry Giving Sight and National Vision Inc. is essential to deliver our plans. Thanks again to everyone involved.

This year our annual meeting focused on "Building resilience and embracing change". As individuals, family members, professionals, VOSH members and an organization as a whole, we have survived a crisis none of us could have imagined a couple of years ago.

I am continually impressed that VOSH/International, through the hard work of its volunteers and the dedication of its leadership, was able to transform the challenges into opportunities to evolve and grow.

Humanitarian clinics are and will always be a vital part of VOSH's work. It is part of our identity. When we had to curtail these clinics for the safety of our volunteers and the patients we care for, our organization pivoted and used the opportunity to better support optometric education around the world and to better cooperate with all of our chapters, in particular our international VOSH and SVOSH chapters.

VOSH volunteers are the embodiment of resilience while embracing change. I am always impressed watching any group of VOSHers walk into an unknown place, size up the resources that are available, determine and rank the needs of a particular patient base and provide excellent eye health and vision care under even the most difficult of conditions. They do all of this while being culturally and locally aware and respectful of individual patients and partner organizations. However, we are not complacent and continue reflecting on inclusion and cultural sensitivity within our work at home in the US and abroad.

This ability to adapt and make the best use of what we have available also contributes to the success of VOSH/International. Our network of volunteer optometrists offers invaluable clinical expertise, research and academic knowledge and our organization makes these strengths available to work for the benefit of patients and fellow optometrists worldwide.

Like the 22 VOSH presidents I follow, I look forward to building upon our successes and identifying a few goals that will define the next two years of my leadership.

To begin with, emphasizing education and cooperation with local schools, chapters and authorities are all critical to getting back to our humanitarian roots in a way that

balances quality, respectful care with the safety of our volunteers and patients and that positions optometry as a key primary health profession.

Continuing to engage our individual chapters, both domestic and international, brings energy, excitement and innovation from a variety of viewpoints and experiences. During this period of change, our VOSH ambassadors have lectured and organized clinical workshops online for SVOSH chapters in Latin America and Ghana in Africa. Our SVOSH chapters in Sinaloa-Mexico, Peru and Nicaragua are collaborating to develop a pilot research program for school screenings based on international best practice that can then be replicated in other countries of the region. Following the same approach, we will be working with the schools of Haiti and Dominican Republic to strengthen clinical practice in the safety of Dajabon near the border of Haiti.

While data collection and reporting may not be exciting, by focusing on generating evidence VOSH/International can contribute to raise awareness of the significant eye health and vision needs that optometrists can address. Data from our clinics could be useful in discussions for the planning and implementation of initiatives aimed at eradicating blindness due to Uncorrected Refractive Error around the world. We can use this information to support our chapters as they work to develop and elevate the profession of optometry globally.

I feel proud to be part of a network of optometrists representing hundreds of years of clinical and academic experience in all aspects of eye care; all available to achieve our common vision and for the service of those who need it most.

We are all professionals, busy with jobs, caring for family and friends, trying to stay healthy and fit and making sense of our new daily routine. I, and everyone at VOSH/International, promise to continue to be available to you, listen to your suggestions and opinions and work together on initiatives that can bring quality eye health and vision care to all.

I look forward to a couple of fulfilling years working with you

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