

President's Insights June 2022

As we celebrate Juneteenth and Pride Month in June, VOSH is proud of our growing diversity and inclusiveness.

VOSH followed up our Statement on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with cultural competency and anti-racism workshops offered to the board and committee members and all of our VOSH and SVOSH chapters. These interactive and thought-provoking sessions led to increased reflection and started an ongoing learning process.

Our board strives to better represent our global nature and all aspects of society. VOSH benefits from the contribution of the very talented and dedicated women that make up about half of our Executive committee, Board of Directors, Executive Volunteers and Staff. Of course, I am beyond proud to be VOSH/International's first openly gay president. VOSH will continue to ensure more diversity and representation at all levels in our organization.

Our Latin America Advisory Committee is just one of many steps towards better representation of our regions in our decision making. The distinguished members of this committee from Mexico, Peru and Nicaragua advise us on the needs and priorities of the chapters and communities in Latin America so that VOSH can provide more effective and tailored programs.

VOSH wouldn't be VOSH without our amazing volunteers. We are the world's largest network of volunteer optometrists and we value the opinions of our optician and ophthalmologist colleagues. Those who come from outside health care offer unique perspectives that might otherwise be missed. Just a couple of examples; our SVOSH Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa Faculty Advisor, Dr. Emiliano Teran Bobadilla, is a physicist, and much of our historical success was guided by our former Executive Director and VOSH-IL member, Natalie Venezia, an attorney. We rely on an extensive network of thousands of lay volunteers who make our humanitarian clinics and educational projects succeed around the world.

Increasingly, VOSH is collaborating with other health care professions on humanitarian care. Many chapters have long-standing partnerships with ophthalmology groups, like SEE International, to provide surgical and tertiary care. Many clinics are multidisciplinary, including nurses, general practitioners and other specialties to care for all of the patient's needs; beyond vision and ocular health. The goal of eliminating vision impairment due to uncorrected refractive error will require cooperation from other professionals. This is a key element of the Integrated People-Centered Eye Care (IPEC) that we will continue to implement. For example, VOSH can help educate teachers and school nurses around the world to screen students and to appropriately refer to eye care professionals.

Thank you to everyone who attended our very successful 2022 Mid-Year Meeting. VOSH's commitment to inclusion and diversity was very evident by our presenters and topics addressed. Dr. Sandra Block, President-elect of WCO, spoke about what Integrated People-Centered Eye Care (IPEC) means for optometry, which then led to an enlightening discussion on VOSH's role

within. A review of the Nicaraguan Project on Vision and Learning was presented by Dr. Jairo Mercado, faculty adviser of our SVOSH chapter at the Universidad Autónoma de Nicaragua (SVOSH-UNAN). This project is a trailblazer in our work on children's vision in the Latin American region. Dr. Mark Rakoczy, VOSH/International treasurer and VOSH-PA president, updated us on how his chapter's teaching clinic organized for the fourth-year optometry students of the Université d'Etat d'Haïti continues VOSH's longtime support of optometry in Haiti. Dr. Hector Santiago highlighted the importance of supporting collaboration between our student chapters through education and research. He shared his recent work in Panama with the SVOSH chapters at the InterAmerican University of Puerto Rico (SVOSH-IAUPR) and the Universidad Especializada de la Americas in Panama (SVOSH-UDELAS) offering vision and eye health services to the Guna indigenous community.

We were thrilled to be joined by our longtime partner Optometry Giving Sight's new Director of Development in North America, Sharyn Gallatin, who shared insights on the current work and priorities of OGS.

I am always encouraged by VOSH's emphasis on engaging with, and caring for, people of all backgrounds, cultures and beliefs. We are certainly stronger, more fulfilled and more effective when we utilize our varied strengths and listen to the diverse voices of our chapters to embrace, cooperate with, and celebrate each other while delivering the best eye care for our patients everywhere.

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