

President's Insights March 2024

In celebration of optometry week: Optometric education is one of our great assets Hector Santiago, OD, PhD, FAAO

The work that hundreds of VOSH/International volunteers do worldwide is wonderful. In 2023, VOSHERS visited Guatemala, Fiji, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and St. Marteen, among other countries. Thousands of people received free comprehensive exams, eyeglasses, and other services. For many, this was the first visual exam in their lives. These people received the gift of vision at least once in their lives.

We hope that the gift to which they are entitled is not temporary. We would like them to be able to receive ongoing primary eye care services.

The best way to promote continuity and sustainability is to support the development of optometric education. That is why VOSH/International has supported the development of optometry schools worldwide. This development has been achieved through VOSH Corps, VOSH Ambassador, VOSH Mentorship, and the Technological Transfer Program (TTP).

A recent example is the work of doctors Robert and Kimberly Molter at Pham Ngoc Thach University in Vietnam, which culminated in the first graduating class of optometrists in 2018. Likewise, VOSH has supported the development of optometry programs in Nicaragua, Panama, Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi.

Another extraordinary example of commitment has been the work of Dr. Mark Rakoczy and VOSH-Pennsylvania in Haiti. Under conditions of extreme difficulty, they visited Haiti to provide clinical training to optometry students at the State University of Haiti. VOSH/International donated the clinical equipment at that school through its Technology Transfer Program (TTP).

The Dominican Republic is a Caribbean country with more than eleven million people. The country did not have a professional optometry program. The Inter American University of Puerto Rico School of Optometry, where I work, helped develop the curriculum. Dr. Dan Twelker visited the program in 2021 and 2022 to support and lecture the students. VOSH/International donated clinical equipment to start the optometry degree at the Technological University of Santiago (UTESA). Our work paid off. This February, I visited the Dominican Republic, where I participated in the graduation of twelve new optometrists from UTESA's first optometry degree program to serve the country.



Image 1 The graduation of twelve new optometrists from the Technological University of Santiago (UTESA) optometry program on February 24th, 2024.

As VOSHERS, we are happy to contribute to the progress of professional education for our future optometrists. Optometric education is how we ensure that our work continues and endures. Congratulations on optometry week to all our colleagues around the world.