

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



February 2021

President's Message – Join Us in the Hard Work Ahead

In my fall 2020 President's Message, I noted the startlingly low numbers of African American students entering California optometry schools. I also mentioned academic studies about how this could harm patients' access to eye care and the quality of that care. I received numerous responses and have included some of those comments further in this piece.

I was heartened later in the fall when my California State Optometry Board colleagues wanted to address these issues in our new Strategic Plan. Our Board has committed to "evaluate and create better consumer outcomes such as access to care and addressing patient needs for marginalized populations by implementation of a multi-step action plan educating licensees about concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion."

This is a big task that requires honest communication, further review of the science, looking to other regulators, industries, and jurisdictions, refinement to the scope and duties of the Board, and finally, development of innovative solutions. This is just one of the tasks we will undertake for optometry and opticianry. You can view all of the objectives in the [Board's Strategic Plan here](#).

I want to communicate our commitment to consumers and these professions, but also to call you to **join us in the hard work ahead**. We need professional and public board members. We enter this year with four vacancies on our Board, and three potential vacancies when terms expire in June of this year. Please consider applying to the Board or encouraging a local community leader to apply.

All the info you need is available [online](#).

Thank you for your input regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. Here are some ideas and recommendations from within the profession. In the next President's Message, look for a reporting of ideas from the optometry schools.

“I recommend you look at program called Improving Diversity in Optometric Careers, I-DOC, offered at OSU College of Optometry. It is a four-day program for undergrad ethnically underrepresented minority students to learn about the field of optometry and hopefully be motivated to apply to the college to increase diversity in the students enrolled.”—Dr. P.

“It is with enthusiasm to respond to your email message about opening educational opportunities for Blacks and students of minority backgrounds. The California State Society for Opticians, a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, has been working with colleges [listed in her letter] on opening several optician programs, with career pathways to become opticians, optometrists, or ophthalmologists By establishing optician programs, our goal is to encourage students to pursue careers of opticianry, optometry, or ophthalmology. There are many opticians who developed careers into optometrists.” — M. Ruby Garcia, Executive Officer, California State Society for Opticians

Mentoring, Mentoring, and ...

“Thank you for highlighting an issue that I first noticed in optometry school 30+ years ago. I had only two Black classmates in my class of 98 students at SCCO and unfortunately that situation hasn't improved. I've made a special effort to recommend the profession of optometry to my Black patients of college age and have referred many of them for further mentorship to the few Black optometrists that I know.” —Dr. P.

*“A simple approach for recruiting and diversifying the applicant pool for optometry is to hire and **mentor** a minority student at an early age, 15–16 years old, to work in your practice. We used this approach over 25 years ago and she is a very well-rounded optometrist today. (Note: Both mother and the teenager were already patients in the practice).”—Dr. E., Oakland*

“Somehow, high school students should be made aware of optometry as a career. Local O.D.s might help with that by speaking at schools. I have invited schools' counselors to bring kids to my office, but no response. Students with good potential but maybe not great grades in high school, like me, could be targeted with advice from school counselors. I advanced from academic mediocrity in high school to honors graduate in optometry, smashing hurdles along the way.” —Dr. M., Lodi

“I believe we need to reach out to the children before they get into junior high, which is when they join gangs. Then continue the reach out in junior high and high school as a continuous mentoring program: a link to professional optometry. What would be even better would be to work with other professionals, like what Western University has . . . and have a interprofessional club or after-school program that is fun, that would be varied—not just optometry—that the kids would be drawn to, to give them the goals, ambition, and hope in their capability to become a professional . . . I want the best for every single person in our state and in our country, regardless of their race or ethnicity.”—Dr. K.

More Mentoring (But Don't Forget About Financial Aid Too)

“I thank you for addressing the lack of diversity in the optometry profession as a whole, including the optometry schools. Addressing the issue is the first step to solving the issue. Optometry schools should look at the applicant pool and provide scholarship opportunities and grants so that a more diverse group of students from various economic backgrounds can afford an education and can benefit from a career in health care as I have. I believe that I have and can make a difference in my own community. I have found that any young individual who works at the office can be inspired to seek a career in optometry and in health care. I would encourage doctors to hire a diverse staff to work in their practice. Provide donations to support education for the younger generation. Mentor young individuals who are looking for guidance. These are small steps each of us can do to make big change in the optometry community.

*“I really admire you for bringing the issue to the forefront and giving each of us the opportunity to reflect and change the way we practice and set a tone in our professional community for the future generations. I am looking forward to hearing from our fellow colleagues on what steps we can take as a profession to address this stark lack of diversity and inequality of opportunity in our profession.”—
Dr. R., Los Altos*

Thank you for engaging in this discussion. Please consider applying to the Board or encouraging a local community leader to apply. I welcome the opportunity to include you in this work. Again, the appointment application may be found [online](#).

Sincerely,



Mark T. Morodomi

President, California State Board of Optometry

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