

EDITORIAL

On Preparedness and Empowerment

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In the United States, there are approximately 34,800 practicing optometrists.¹ Today, doctors of optometry enjoy a variety of practice modalities, including private practice, community health centers, hospitals, commercial establishments, industry, and academia, along with other options. The American Optometric Association estimated that, in 2008, 25%

of all optometrists were self-employed in private practice or with other health care professionals.² Practice opportunities are expected to grow 24% between 2008 and 2018.³ This is due, in part, to the epidemiology of eye diseases and a growing population of baby boomers who value eye care. Additionally, 25% of all practicing optometrists are approaching retirement age, which will open up even more potential practice opportunities.

Each year, approximately 1,400 optometry students graduate from optometric institutions. Once these graduates have been granted a license in their desired state, they are ready to enter the job market. Have optometric institutions prepared graduates to be successful in any practice modality? All optometric institutions teach the required knowledge base and necessary clinical skills. They provide opportunities for upper-level students to be trained in a variety of specialty areas while experiencing a number of different practice modalities. Many institutions offer courses in practice management, public health, and electronic medical records to help prepare students for future practice. In addition, career centers at optometric institutions often invite alumni and guest speakers to present information about their practice modalities to provide role models and resources for students. Mentorship programs can be helpful in giving new graduates a link to the vast number of practice modalities available to them.

What qualities or skills are needed to be successful in a particular practice modality? I can hypothesize that for success in most practice modalities, graduates must be adaptable, motivated, confident, self-directed, able to accurately evaluate their skills and needs, and able to access and utilize available resources. Many of these characteristics are personal

qualities that must be possessed by the individual. Optometric institutions may be able to provide opportunities to develop and further expand these qualities. Self-directed learning, early clinical experiences, and clinical experiences, such as those provided through participation in organizations such as Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity, provide opportunities for students to demonstrate independence, deepen their motivation, and build confidence. A student's level of confidence at graduation is one outcome of his learning and clinical experience.

To accurately evaluate if optometric education is preparing students for any type of practice modality, more information is needed. Educational research is needed to ensure that optometric education is meeting the needs of students and new graduates.

What skills are needed to be successful in each practice modality? What personal qualities are needed to be successful? Where do students develop the qualities and skills needed for success? Are those qualities innate or can they be developed? What experiences best prepare students? How do students learn best? Is it from course work, experiences, observation, or simulation?

This issue of *Optometric Education* explores some relevant themes to help us gain perspective on these difficult questions. In this issue, McGinley and Carlson acknowledge that demanding curricula are required to prepare graduates for entry-level practice and to enable students to pursue their preferred practice modalities. Their work explores the methods students use to cope with educational challenges through their choices in study techniques.

Bartlett and colleagues critically analyze assessment methods that ultimately determine a student's readiness for practice. Accurate methods of assessment are used to evaluate knowledge base, clinical thinking, and ability to integrate information. Students must meet certain educational criteria before they are deemed ready to practice. The design of examination material has potential influence on our outcomes measures.

Also in this issue, contributors to the Think Tank feature share their insights about one practice choice: private optometric practice. Are our students prepared, and what should we, as educators, be doing to help them pursue this option?

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(continued)

Information will empower institutions. Institutions will then empower students, with the ultimate impact benefiting the patients our profession serves. In what practice modality will our students serve these patients, and will they be prepared? It is up to us to make it happen.

References:

1. Bureau of Labor Statistic, accessed Jan. 30, 2010 at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos073.htm>, modified Dec. 17, 2009.
2. AOA Web site.
3. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed Jan. 30, 2010 at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos073.htm>, modified Dec. 17, 2009.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Implementing the Teaching of Critical & Clinical Thinking

The teaching of critical and clinical thinking has reached the forefront of educators in all fields. In most professions, including optometry, critical thinking as related to clinical decisions and patient care is a specific outcome of the educational process.

In recognition of these educational outcomes, many optometric institutions have initiated courses dedicated to teaching critical thinking, clinical decision-making, and integration of knowledge. In the spirit of the scholarship of teaching and learning, *Optometric Education* would like to announce a future theme edition, which will focus on courses designed to achieve the goals of teaching critical thinking, clinical decision-making, and integration of knowledge. We invite all educators involved in these courses to participate in the theme edition. We are sending out this invitation early to allow for adequate time to design appropriate evaluative or interventional studies. The theme edition is tentatively scheduled for Fall 2010 and the deadline for submissions is Aug. 1, 2010.

The scholarship of teaching and learning is a “deep curiosity about how, when, where, and why people learn and how best to teach to create optimal learning opportunities.” For additional information on this concept, go to http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/cet/sotl_info.htm.

Accepted manuscripts will include: innovative teaching methodologies, course description and assessment, research on how, when, and why students learn about clinical thinking, or teaching interventions that increased learning.

For additional information on the theme edition contact Dr Aurora Denial, Associate Editor, deniala@neco.edu.