

My Best Day in Optometric Education: Wednesday

David A. Damari, OD, FCOVD, FAAO



My career in optometry has been quite diverse. I have done a residency, been a part-time associate in a private practice, and worked a few days a week at a mall-based commercial practice. I started and eventually sold my own practice specializing in vision therapy, and I did a fellowship-in-residence at the National Board.

I returned to full-time academic optometry 12 years ago, and I have held administrative posts for the last 10 years.

Having experienced so many aspects of our profession, however, I still get my biggest kick from seeing patients, which I do only one day a week. That day is Wednesday.

Even though I have learned from and been mentored by some of the best, most knowledgeable optometric educators ever, I believe I have learned more about optometry from my patients than from any one teacher or mentor. I certainly learn more from my patients than I learn in any continuing education course. I discover more about how different conditions are manifested in real life and how those conditions can affect the quality of life of people in every aspect of school, recreation, and work. Most importantly, I learn how to effectively communicate what I have found during the visual evaluation and ocular examination, regardless of the patient's educational or cultural background. And the best thing about being an optometric educator is that I get to experience this learning process in the presence of my students, so they can share in the process and become better optometrists. My students challenge me every day to be a more effective clinician and educator, and I would not have it any other way.

I am not suggesting that my other work is not important. If there is any question about the importance of outcomes assessment in higher education today, just review any publication from our regional accrediting organizations, the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, or the Department of Education from the last seven years or so. We owe it to our students to know, through valid measurements, that we are delivering on the promise of a quality professional education. Classroom teaching is also important, although the more experience I have with lecturing, the less enamored I become with it as a teaching technique. I became an optometrist to help patients use their vision



more effectively, and I find that, even after 20 years, I still get considerable joy from doing just that.

Of all the activities in which I have participated, however, seeing patients is most effective at making me a better optometrist, a better optometric educator, and a better administrator. Seeing patients with students is an even richer experience for me, and it allows my students to experience how optometry can improve people's quality of life at least as much as any other health care profession, by helping improve human achievement in academics, most occupations, and athletics.

So as long as my patient care day is Wednesday, you will be able to find me in our Eye Center, surrounded by patients and students and enjoying every minute. Yes, Wednesday is indeed a very good day.

Dr. Damari is professor and chair of the Department of Assessment at Southern College of Optometry.