

Optimum VA



The Official Newsletter of the
National Association of Veterans Affairs Optometrists

Fall 2013

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Optimum VA Newsletter is a quarterly publication distributed in December, March, June and September.

Deadline for submissions are 11/30, 2/28, 5/31, and 8/31 respectively.

Please e-mail any submissions to our newsletter editor, Dawn N. Tomasini at dawn.tomasini@va.gov

President's Column

Brian Kawasaki, O.D., M.B.A.

Brian S. Kawasaki, O.D., M.B.A.

PRESIDENT



Dear NAVAO Members,

Voting for the NAVAO offices of President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer during our biennial elections closed on August 31, 2013. Many thanks to all of our members who voted and to all of our candidates for their willingness to lead this organization for the next term. The results will be formally announced to members by the Teller of Ballots during our annual Business Meeting on Thursday, October 24, 2013 in Seattle as per the NAVAO By-Laws.

We are looking forward to seeing everyone at our 2013 annual meeting which is scheduled for the evening of Thursday, October 24, 2013 at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel in conjunction with the American Academy of Optometry Meeting. As always, the Business Meeting is open to active NAVAO members only and will be held from 7:15-8:00 PM. It will immediately be followed by the reception and program at 8:00 PM where we will be honoring Mr. David Danielson for his many years of service to the optometric profession, as well as our keynote speaker and Founding NAVAO President, Dr. Robert Newcomb. The title of Dr. Newcomb's talk is "*Origin of an Organization: The History of NAVAO.*" We would also like to thank the American Board of Certification in Medical Optometry (ABCMO) for their sponsorship towards this year's drink tickets for attendees. Please visit our website for more details about the meeting (www.navao.org). We look forward to seeing you soon!

We are also pleased to announce the availability of four, \$250 scholarships for use at the upcoming American Academy of Optometry meeting available by application to current, active resident NAVAO members. These scholarships are thanks to the generous sponsorship of the International Engineering Technology (IET) Foundation. We would like to thank our Membership Director, Dr. Kathy Wang, for her assistance in obtaining and coordinating these scholarships. Details and application instructions have been emailed to residents, announcements have been made during the monthly VA Optometry Service Conference call, and an email blast was sent to members. We have very pleased with the response from residents and the number of applications received thus far. The deadline to apply is Monday, September 30 and the scholarship recipients will be announced at this year's meeting in Seattle.

As this is my final newsletter column to you as NAVAO President, I wanted to extend my deepest appreciation to all of our members for the opportunity to serve this organization for the past eight years (four years as Vice-President and four years as President). It has been a wonderful experience and I have learned so much along the way. I have also been able to witness how dedicated our members are to our veterans, VA optometry, and the profession. In addition, I have been tremendously fortunate to work with an outstanding group of board and committee members who volunteer their time and work tirelessly throughout the year to make sure that our

organization remains active and vibrant. We would not have been able to accomplish all that we have over the past several years without their dedicated service and contributions. Please join me in welcoming your incoming officers for 2013-2015 during their installation at this year's Business Meeting.

Many thanks to each of you for your continued membership in NAVAO. Your support enables us to work towards achieving our goal of 100% membership and representing a truly unified voice for ALL VA optometrists!

I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming meeting in Seattle!

Sincerely,

Brian

From the Editor

Dawn N. Tomasini, O.D., F.A.A.O.



Welcome to Fall! There is so much information in this last issue of the current executive board. Our annual meeting is around the corner and the NAVAO newsletter committee wants to make sure you are all updated ahead of time. First off, we are regretfully saying goodbye to our beloved President, Brian Kawasaki and Vice President, David Storer. I personally was honored to work with both of these extremely dedicated individuals. The election results for the new executive board have been recorded and will be announced at the annual meeting in a few weeks. This issue provides a background on all the candidates and we wish everyone good luck. Background information on our keynote speakers and honoree for the annual meeting are also included to prepare you as well.

Our summer edition included the updated version of Dr. Angela Musick's Promotion Guide. The NAVAO newsletter committee was lucky enough to interview Dr. Musick for her unofficial information on the Promotions and Standards Board.

Dr. Joseph Pruitt's wonderful piece on optometry missions which was published in our last edition inspired other members to tell of their experiences with optometry mission trips. We are fortunate enough to have Dr. Robert Wang not only give an account of his mission trip but links to a "you tube" video consisting of a compilation of photos and videos shot during their mission trip.

Also included in this issue is another installation of our series on “One VA, Many Different Clinics,” a series that is meant to highlight the numerous differences in how each of our clinics run. This particular piece concentrates on the growth of a VA clinic over time and what constitutes successful growth.

Overall, this is a jam-packed edition with lots of information. I hope you all enjoy it as we prepare for our annual meeting in a few weeks!

Updates from the NAVAIO Board

David G. Storer, O.D.

VICE-PRESIDENT



I wanted to take this opportunity to sincerely thank everyone, in the membership for allowing me the opportunity to represent you for the past six years on your NAVAIO Board.

I have been most impressed in the execution of my responsibilities with the commitment and professionalism of all of the NAVAIO Board members, NAVAIO Committee members, as well as the entire NAVAIO field membership. Based upon my experience on the Board, I remain firmly convinced that NAVAIO is a key component to both VA optometry and optometry, in general.

It has been a distinct pleasure for me personally to have had the opportunity to serve you these past six years. As a VA field optometrist, I look forward to supporting our new Board that will be installed at the fall business meeting.

Warm regards,
Dave Storer, O.D.

Janel L. Chou, O.D.

SECRETARY



Hello NAAVO members, fall is finally here! Where did the summer go? Time seems to go by so fast these days, so if you want to catch up on the latest news within the VA don't forget to check out the minutes to the monthly optometry service conference call located in the *members* section of our website. Included are updated open optometry staff positions and VHA Handbooks, news from the various committees such as education programs within the VA and new modules in low vision. We are now being tracked on productivity so it will be important to keep abreast of changes and goals and other advancements for future VA such as the expansion of Teleretinal Imaging and improvements in electronic medical records. You can also get quick reminders and announcements about AFOS and NAAVO within the recorded minutes. I will continue to post the minutes as quickly as possible and if you have any questions or feedback about the current minutes, please contact me. I look forward to seeing you all in Seattle at our annual business meeting next month!!

Maresha Sink, O.D.

TREASURER



We are looking forward to an exciting meeting in Seattle next month! Although it will be sad to see Brian Kawasaki and David Storer finish their terms as our president and vice president respectively, we have an exciting future with our new officers. I personally want to thank Dave and Brian for their excellent leadership and dedication to this organization, and it has been an honor working with you both. I know many of you will be at our meeting and reception in Seattle, and Minna Huang and her events committee have a great event planned. Don't forget to thank them for a job well done!

We are in the process of finalizing our budget for 2014 and are currently coming in under budget for 2013. We have scholarships set up for residents and a growing membership, and I personally am looking forward to seeing our organization

continue to grow and serve the greatest group of ODs in the country.

I hope you all had a great summer and if there is anything we can do to serve you better, please let us know. See you in Seattle!

Gay K. Tokumaru, O.D.

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT



NO UPDATES AT THIS TIME

Katherine L. Wang, O.D.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR



We have about 60 new appointments in 2013. There are about 30+ new resident membership this year, the highest recorded! In addition, there are four \$250 scholarships available (for use at the American Academy of Optometry) by application for active, NAVAO resident members. The sponsorship is from International Engineering Technology Foundation. Applications are still being received for the scholarships and the four winners will be announced at the American Academy of Optometry NAVAO reception.

As the membership drive approaches, please encourage your fellow optometrists to join NAVAO to best represent VA optometry!

Minna Huang, O.D.

MEMBER-AT-LARGE (Director of Events)



NO UPDATES AT THIS TIME

Kevin Mercado, O.D.

DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY



Please continue to log in and browse the NAVAIO website for updates and hopefully useful information - especially the frequently updated "Open Positions," "News" and "Optometry Service News" sections. As always, feel free to contact me with any questions or suggestions regarding our website! I hope to see you in Seattle!

Meet the Nominees for the 2013 NAVAIO Elections

Voting for NAVAIO officers closed on August 31, 2013. Many thanks to all of our members who voted and to all of the candidates! The results will be formally announced to members by the Teller of Ballots during our annual Business Meeting on Thursday, October 24, 2013 as per the NAVAIO By-Laws.

Treasurer - 2013

The Treasurer shall receive all monies paid to the Association and keep an accurate account of all funds received and disbursed for official activities. The Treasurer shall make a verbal and written report of all financial matters to the membership at the annual meeting. The Treasurer is the chair of the Finance Committee. He or she may serve an indefinite number of terms.

Candidates:

- **Dr. Michelle Lynch**
- **Dr. Makesha Sink**

Dr. Michelle Lynch's Candidate Statement:

Michelle Chen Lynch received her Doctor of Optometry degree at Indiana University Bloomington. She went on to complete a residency program in Primary Care at the San Francisco VA Medical Center. Afterwards, she joined the Lexington VA Medical Center in Lexington, KY as a staff optometrist. During her time there, she became an Academy Fellow, started the residency program as the Residency Coordinator, and actively participated in various clinical operations, including Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA), Systems Redesign, Goal Sharing and Labor Mapping. In late 2012, she relocated to the state of Florida to join the clinic at the Ocala CBOC in Ocala, FL.

Michelle currently serves on the NAVAIO Newsletter Committee, AFOS Membership Committee, and Field Advisory Sub-committee for Education. Her past involvements include being a contributor to the Continuum of Care Low Vision and Blind Rehabilitation Modules on Talent Management System (TMS), Continuing Education Quality Assurance Monitor for the American Academy of Optometry conferences, Chair for the Optometry VISN 9 Inter-facility Consult Committee and member of the National VA Optometry Recruitment Committee.

Her motivation in running for the Treasurer position is her desire to serve the VA Optometry organization and to represent NAVAIO with good stewardship. Her previous budgetary and business planning experiences within the VA align her with the Treasurer's role in finance and fiscal prudence.

After coming to Florida and settling in on a farm, her family, including 3 children, recently welcomed a surprise newborn baby calf.

Dr. Makesha Sink's Candidate Statement:

My name is Makesha Sink and it has been an honor serving NAVAIO as treasurer for the past 4 years. I am interested in continuing to serve in this capacity and to continuing to grow and improve this great organization. I have been a VA optometrist and member of NAVAIO for 10 years and running. In the past 4 years, we have begun a budget process for the organization which has allowed the individual committees of our organization to better plan for their yearly activities and to work together accordingly. It has also given us the ability to bring our annual financial statement from being in the red when I first started to being in the black! I have worked with my finance committee to digitalize our old records and I hope to be able to store this information in a safe, secure place on our website so this data is available for future reference.

It has been an honor to serve with the current officers of NAVAIO and the committees; they are an excellent, professional group of individual that work tirelessly to provide and maintain current information through our website and Newsletter, and host an excellent reception and business meeting each year where we can hear your desires for the future of the organization. We continue to keep the founding principles and the future of NAVAIO in mind with all of our decisions.

Thanks for your vote – see you in Seattle!

Makesha Sink, OD, FAAO

Secretary - 2013

The Secretary shall transcribe the minutes and record the roll of the annual meeting and will carry out the correspondence of the Association as determined by the President. The Secretary shall also transcribe the minutes of the monthly VA Optometry Service conference calls and distribute them to the Members. He or she may serve an indefinite number of terms.

Candidate: Dr. Janel Chou (Dr. Chou is running unopposed)

Dr. Janel Chou's Candidate Statement:

Hello fellow NAVAIO members.

My name is Janel Chou and I would love the opportunity to continue my work as the Secretary of the NAVAIO. I feel I am determined, hard-working, and reliable. I am dedicated to serving in the best interest of all NAVAIO members and hold the belief that we should continue to listen to each and every one of our members in order to truly represent VA Optometrists. As Secretary, I believe I can act on that belief by continuing to relay important events and information between members and the executive board. At the end of the day, the only way that NAVAIO can continue to be successful is through its members' active engagement and support. As the current secretary of the NAVAIO, I've taken great joy in promoting that engagement through our website and newsletter, working with the other committee members, being a liaison for the membership committee, and by reporting the monthly conference calls. We have made a lot of innovative changes within NAVAIO to serve you better, and I hope to continue on this path to help attract more members, further improve the efficiency of communication through our website, aid in providing more benefits to members, and grow our strength as an organization within the VA and the larger optometric community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Janel Chou

Vice-President - 2013

The Vice-President shall act as an alter-ego to the President and shall assume all the duties and responsibilities of the President during his or her absence. The Vice-President will serve as an ex-officio member of all standing committees and selected special committees, according to the wishes of the President. The Vice-President must be a full-time member at a VA facility which offers direct patient care. The Vice-President may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms of this office.

Candidates:

- **Dr. Dale Fath**
- **Dr. Kelly Thomann**

Dr. Dale Fath's Candidate Statement:

I am running for the office of Vice President of NAVAIO. I started with the VA in 1981 at the Fort Wayne VAMC establishing the optometry section and extern affiliation with the Indiana University School of Optometry and later expanding optometric services to the Marion VAMC. I left that position in 1989 to join a multidisciplinary private practice in Fort Wayne but remained with the VA in a consultant status until accepting my current position establishing the Morehead City CBOC eye clinic in 2008.

Until my recent retirement from the Indiana Air National Guard, 122nd Medical Group (MDG) based in Fort Wayne, where I served as the Officer in Charge of the Optometry Section and more recently as the Medical Group Commander, including a 5 month deployment as the 447th EMEDS Commander at Sather Air Force Base in Iraq in 2010, I felt I did not have the necessary time required to devote to our organization. Now with additional time available I would appreciate the opportunity to work on your behalf to continue to enhance and expand the role of optometry within the VA.

I have considerable experience with other optometric organizations, serving for years on the executive committees of both the Indiana University Optometric Alumni Association and the Air National Guard Optometric Association.

I hold in highest regard our nation's Veterans and those of us fortunate enough to assist in their healthcare. I would consider your selection to serve as NAVAIO Vice President and to represent, in my opinion, the finest collective group of optometrists in our profession an honor. Thank you for my nomination and your consideration in the upcoming election.

Dr. Kelly Thomann's Candidate Statement:

I am essentially a VA "lifer". I love working with veterans and take great pride in the academic environment the VA provides, which includes teaching and mentoring students and residents on a daily basis. I understand the integral role the VA has taken in the advancement of our profession. At this point in my career, I would like to renew and increase my involvement in NAVAIO because this organization plays a vital role in serving the

interests of all VA Optometrists. I would also be honored to continue the excellent work of our previous and current NAVAIO leadership.

I am a 1989 graduate of the SUNY, State College of Optometry and completed my residency in Hospital Based Optometry at the FDR VA Hospital. I have been on the medical staff at VA Hudson Valley since 1991 and have been Chief/Program Manager of Optometry Service since 1999. I have been a member of NAVAIO since 1991 and served as the NAVAIO Newsletter Editor from 1993 to 1995.

In addition to being a Fellow in the American Academy of Optometry, I received ACMO board certification in June 2005. I hold adjunct faculty positions at SUNY College of Optometry, NECO and New York Medical College. I was the primary editor of the textbook, Primary Eyecare in Systemic Disease. I have been a contributing author in several other textbooks and was a co-editor of the journal, Clinical Eye and Vision Care. I lecture frequently on topics of ocular disease and have authored numerous posters at continuing education conferences.

President - 2013

It shall be the duty of the President to direct the business of the Association, to call together and preside at all meetings of the Executive Committee or Board, to call and preside at an annual meeting of Members of the Association, and to see that the Constitution and By-Laws are enforced. The President is an ex-officio member of all standing and special committees. The President shall serve as the official representative of this Association in its contacts with other optometric, public, and private organizations. The President must be a full-time member at a VA facility which offers direct patient care. He or she may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms of this office.

Candidates:

Dr. Joseph Pruitt

Dr. Nancy Wong

Dr. Joseph Pruitt's Candidate Statement:

Hello, my name is Joseph Pruitt and I am hoping to be entrusted with your vote for NAVAIO President. I will start with a little about myself. Originally from Southern California, I practice at the Minneapolis VA. Confused? It will soon make sense when I go on to say my wife is a 4th year medical student at Mayo Clinic Medical School. Additionally, my wife and I are proud parents of a wonderful 20-month old son. I am a graduate of the Illinois College of Optometry (ICO) and completed my residency at the West LA VA Healthcare Center. Furthermore, I obtained my Master's in Business Administration from Nova Southeastern University. My service history includes being the Vice-President, followed by being the President, of ICO's National Optometric Student Association (NOSA) chapter. Afterwards, I served as NOSA's National Vice-President. Currently, I proudly serve on NAVAIO's Newsletter Committee and am the Vice-Chair of the Armed Forces Optometric Society's (AFOS) Awards Committee. Having recently (within the last 2-3 years) implemented my facility's first optometric education/training program, I serve as the coordinator to both the externship and residency

programs.

My desire to become President originates from my genuine passion for optometry. Being an optometrist is the only thing I have ever wanted to do since the age of 7 (true story and not an application essay ploy.) As such, my desire is to continue to honor the profession by unreservedly serving the organization that represents one of its greatest contributions to society, NAVAIO.

Thank you.

Dr. Nancy Wong's Candidate Statement:

I am a candidate for NAVAIO President. I received my OD/PhD from SUNY and completed a hospital-based residency at FDR VA Hospital (NY). I have been a member of the medical staff of VA Hudson Valley Health Care System (NY) for >16 years. Currently, I serve as supervisor of the Residency Program and Coordinator of Research and Development (R&D). I serve on the NBEO Advanced Competence in Medical Optometry (ACMO) Committee/Council, NBEO Continuing Professional Development in Optometry (CPDO) Examination Committee/Council and AAO Fellowship Admittance Committee.

I have been a member of NAVAIO for >16 years and continue to serve on the NAVAIO Events Committee. As NAVAIO President, my goal is continue the work of past NAVAIO leadership. I would continue to serve as NAVAIO representative to optometric, public, and private organizations. Additionally, as a NAVAIO member, I recognize the importance of the organization's membership. The membership promotes the highest level of eyecare for our nation's Veterans and promotes the education, training, professional growth, and welfare of optometric staff, research/clinical fellows, residents, and students. Therefore, an important goal is to continue to increase membership. I hope to continue to engage the membership's involvement in supporting NAVAIO's mission and workgroups. Additionally, I would like to continue promoting NAVAIO's technological progression as demonstrated by the NAVAIO website, membership registration, and online resources. Collectively, NAVAIO leadership and membership continue to promote VA optometry and VA eyecare to the nation's Veterans.

Keynote Speaker for the 2013 NAVAO Annual Meeting

Robert D. Newcomb, O.D., M.P.H., FAAO



Robert D. Newcomb, O.D., M.P.H., FAAO
Founding President, NAVAO
Clinical Professor Emeritus (The Ohio State University College of Optometry)
Past President, AAO

Robert D. Newcomb received his Doctor of Optometry degree from The Ohio State University in 1971. He then served for three years at the Mayport, Florida, Naval Station as the officer-in-charge of its optometry clinic. He began his career with the Veterans Administration (VA) in 1974 while working toward a Master of Public Health degree, which was granted in 1975, from the University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB).

Dr. Newcomb taught at the UAB School of Optometry and examined patients at the Birmingham VA Medical Center for six years, during which time he founded the National Association of VA Optometrists and their newsletter, *Optimum VA*. In 1980, he returned to his home state of Ohio to begin a nationally-recognized program of optometric patient care, education, and scholarship at the Columbus VA Outpatient Clinic.

In 1997, Dr. Newcomb accepted a faculty appointment at The Ohio State University College of Optometry, where he was a Professor of Clinical Optometry and the Vision Service Plan (VSP) Chair for the Advancement of Professional Practice for fifteen years. During that time, he was a clinical instructor and lectured in geriatric optometry, ocular disease, pharmacology, public health, and professional/ethical behaviors courses for fifteen years. He also served first as the College's Clinic Director, and then later as the College's Residency Director.

Over the past thirty-five years, Dr. Newcomb has authored over 75 publications, including two textbooks and seven textbook chapters. And he has served on numerous local, state and national committees for the profession of optometry, including being President of the American Academy of Optometry and Chair of the National Academy of Practice in Optometry. He received the Optometry Outstanding Service and Recognition Award from the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States in 1997; and was elected into the National Academies of Practice in 1998. In 2002, he received the Warren G. and Ruth P. Morris Optometrist of the Year Award from the Ohio Optometric Association. And in 2006, he was honored to receive the American Academy of Optometry's Eminent Service Award.

Dr. Newcomb retired from OSU in 2012, and is now a Professor Emeritus of Clinical Optometry. In retirement, he and his wife, Pam, enjoy traveling when he is not working on his next book, *The 100-Year History of the OSU College of Optometry*, which will be published in 2014.

Honoree for the 2013 NAVAO Annual Meeting

Mr. David Danielson

Mr. David Danielson

AOA Consultant

Former AOA Deputy Director of Government Relations



Mr. David Danielson, Former Deputy Director of Government Relations for the American Optometric Association announced his retirement earlier this year. He has been involved with Federal Service Optometry since December of 1974 and has been instrumental in making VA Optometry what it is today. His achievements in Federal Service Optometry are expansive and include milestones in the development of VA Optometry.

The advancements in VA Optometry during his 35 years of service are astounding. In the 1970's, he was involved in the creation of VA Optometry Service, including a director position in VA Central Office, and then later established a VA optometry pay scale equal to that of VA physicians and dentists.

During the 1980's, the VA mandated preventative routine vision exams, including eye care for dependents of active duty under CHAMPUS (now TRICARE). Separate service programs were created for Army, Navy and Air Force and an optometry officer position was created within the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense – Health Affairs.

The decade of the 1990-2000 brought forth additional VA optometry staffing and established fringe benefits for VA optometry residents.

Since 2000, Mr. Danielson was helpful in implementing provisions for retention special pay for military optometry officers and established the VA low vision initiative entitled "Continuum of Care" which has provided 54 low vision specialist optometrists within the VA, including the creation of VICTORS program. More recently, efforts have been concentrated at the creation and appropriations for the DOD/VA Vision Center of Excellence, as well as the creation of the Major Charles Robert Soltes, Jr., O.D. VA Blind Rehabilitation Center in Long Beach, CA.

The National Association of VA Optometrists wishes Mr. Danielson all the best in his retirement and sincerely thanks him for his over 38 years of dedicated service to VA optometry, the optometric profession, and our nation's veterans. We look forward to continuing to work with Mr. Danielson in his new role as Consultant to the AOA.

Interview with Dr. Angela Musick

In our last issue, the NAVAIO Newsletter Committee published Dr. Angela Musick's unofficial VHA Optometry Promotion Guide. We publish this guide once a year because we strongly believe that it is one of THE most helpful tools a VA optometrist can have. Newly boarded VA optometrists are fortunate enough to receive this guide in a welcome email sent by the VHA Optometry Field Advisory Committee on Staff Recruitment and Retention which Dr. Musick chairs. While the Newsletter Committee was not able to interview individual members of the Promotions and Standards Board, we asked Dr. Musick to *unofficially* answer some questions as to how the PSB board works.



Angela N. Musick, OD, FAAO

Dr. Angela Musick earned her O.D. degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, School of Optometry (UABSO), and completed a residency in Primary Care Optometry at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. She is currently a staff optometrist at the Salem VA Medical Center, where she supervises the student program and works with fellow optometrists overseeing resident clinical and didactic education. She is an adjunct faculty member at Rosenberg School of Optometry in San Antonio, Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University, Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, and Edward Via Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine. She is a VHA Optometry Mentor, the Point of Contact for the Optometry Mentor program, and the author of the *unofficial* VHA Optometry Promotion Guide. Dr. Musick serves on the VHA Optometry Field Advisory Committee (FAC) and is the chair of the (FAC) Staff Recruitment and Retention Committee. She is a member of NAVAIO, serves AFOS as a member of the Executive Council, and serves the AOA as a member of the Publications and Education Committee. Her publications may be found in *Optometry*, *Optometry and Vision Science*, and *Clinical and Refractive Optometry*.

1. How are the members of the PSB selected? And how long do they serve?

ANM: I believe they are appointed by Dr. Townsend, but I am not completely sure. I do not believe there is a limit to service. I do know that all the members need to be (at least) Chief grade.

2. How many members are there (I think there are only 3?) and why?

ANM: I do not know the total number, though I think you are correct that only 3 meet at a time. They rotate meeting, so that the same members do not meet every time (with the exception of Dr. Townsend).

3. How often does the PSB meet?

ANM: Every two weeks.

4. How often have you heard that the PSB board makes a recommendation, but the local facility drops the step increase due to lack of funding?

ANM: I am not at liberty to give out specifics, but it does happen, and facility directors are not under an obligation to follow the recommendations made by the board. Most directors do try to take the board decisions into account, though. They understand why the board has convened, and they usually understand the need for the PSB, but the facility director has the final decision in each matter.

5. Do you feel that the qualifications for grade increase have become more or less stringent over time? Are more or less people getting approved for grade increases now than before?

ANM: The qualifications have not changed in decades. The way they are interpreted by the PSB has changed over the years, and I would say that the interpretation has changed in favor of the optometrists making the requests. I once spoke with a person who took part in the writing of the qualification standards, and he said the intent was not to keep ODs from promoting but merely to make sure that the VAMC had the best and brightest optometrists available for our nation's veterans. I could not guess whether more or less people are approved for promotions, though. Our numbers have changed, the economy has changed... the world of government optometry is different than it was 10 years ago.

6. With the loss of time in grade requirements, is it possible to advance 2 grades at once if all the criteria are met?

ANM: In theory, yes... but the rules for grade promotion are still in place. When advancing a grade, the pay rate within the new grade must approximate a 2-3 step pay raise, but not more. That means that advancing 2 grades may be possible in theory, but may not work in practice. And such an advancement would depend not only on the pay tables established by OPM, but also on the views of an OD's local leadership. We may find that local leaders believe promoting 2 grades at once is ill advised.

Another thing to remember: Even though the time-in-grade requirements have been rescinded, in order to meet GS 13 or higher, you still have to have 4 years of experience (a residency counts for 2 years). This is part of the qualification standards, and the qualification standards must be met for any promotion.

7. Do you feel that there should be any changes to the way the PSB runs?

ANM: I don't see why. The Optometry PSB is actually one of the more efficiently run boards in the VA.

8. What do you think is the best way to inform newly boarded optometrists of the promotion process?

ANM: Any newly boarded ODs should speak with their Optometry Mentors. The Mentors work hard to keep up with the promotion regulations, and they volunteer mainly so that newly boarded ODs have someone to help them.

9. For those people who are at the beginning of their grade level i.e. 13-6, if they meet the qualifications to promote to the next grade, do you recommend that they go ahead and do so at that time, or wait until they are at the top of their grade via SAA/SAP and WIGI i.e. 13-10 to move to the next grade (in theory, can someone just go from 13-6 to 14-6)?

ANM: Hmm. That is an interesting question. Before the change in time-in-grade requirements, I would have said 'work your way to the top of the grade while you wait,' but things have changed. Due to the promotion rules (mentioned in question 6) though, one cannot promote from a 13-6 to a 14-6. The best you could hope for is a 14-3. That is still within the next grade though, and an SAA or SAP (or WIGI) would then create advancement within the grade. I guess I would approach that question on a case by case basis, but if the pay tables support a promotion from step 6, there is nothing to stop someone from trying. I would say that there is a great deal of paperwork and time (other people's time) devoted to any person's promotion... the PSB, HR, facility committees and directors... it may not be wise to receive a promotion, then turn right around and ask your facility for another promotion immediately following.

Growth of a VA Optometry Clinic

When I completed my residency in the late 1980s and began my VA career, the Eye Clinic at my VA facility consisted of a single exam room, an office/photography/perimetry room (totaling 400 sq.ft.) and a staff of one (me). Now, 26 years later, the Eye Clinic is an 8500 sq.ft. Behemoth: 40+ rooms, 14 exam rooms and a staff of 17, including 10 optometrists and three opticians. All of the equipment is brand new and networked to our own dedicated server. After doing our research, we elected to go with our own server rather than importing information through a DICOM connector which requires tremendous IT support. While there are four CBOC's associated with the Medical Center, leadership has decided that all eye care should be provided in the hospital; however, that may change in the future. Our training program has expanded from a single affiliate and one intern to two affiliates, four residents and eight interns. This year we brought on a full-time ophthalmologist for the first time in the history of our facility.

Expansion of this magnitude has not been easy but was inevitable with the population growth of the surrounding city during these years. From my experience, success of an Eye/Optometry Clinic in the VA is an amalgam of several factors:

1. Luck. I was fortunate enough to start in a small outpatient clinic that did not have ophthalmology. As such, Optometry was THE source of eye care for veterans in this catchment area. Not having to compete with ophthalmology allowed me to establish Optometry as a reliable and productive source of eye care for the veterans and the outpatient clinic staff. Having no surgical capability in our clinic and having reliable referral sources within the Network to send patients for surgery also helped discourage bringing on an ophthalmologist for many years.

2. Expansion was slow and I was the only VA optometrist at my facility for ten years (with a single intern). After selecting the second optometrist, I was given additional FTE to hire every couple of years to keep up with the demand. I never passed on any opportunity to add more staff or equipment, even when space wasn't really available. I knew that leadership would eventually make space available.

3. Absolutely critical to the success of this Eye Clinic was careful selection of my staff optometrists. I cannot emphasize how important it is to do your due diligence in selecting professional staff. For all intents-and-purposes, you are looking at professional plural marriage. You have to select individuals who think the same clinically, who have the same work ethic and who have the same attitude toward patient care and teaching. Any diversion from this formula will most surely result in a less-than-ideal work environment. Also, for clinics that have more than three optometrists, I think monthly staff meetings are an important opportunity for everyone to sit down and discuss problems, brainstorm solutions, make announcements and discuss clinic issues in general. While I make this meeting mandatory, I think that most everyone looks forward to this time together.

4. Continuity of leadership is another important factor for success. Having an Optometry Chief who has been present for years helps create long lasting relationships with leadership and other key department chiefs. This helps optometry move in to membership on important committees and chairmanships on important committees and generally helps bypass obstacles and red-tape. This also helps keep optometry on the pulse of the facility and helps the chief steer clear of pitfalls, take advantage of opportunities and secure resources for the Eye Clinic.

Every VA hospital and outpatient clinic is different as are the politics of each facility. Steering clear of mistakes (as best you can), taking advantage of opportunities and careful hiring of staff are pearls of success that apply to any VA Optometry Clinic.

A Closer Look at Optometry Missions

*By Robert Wang, OD
Jack C. Montgomery VAMC, Muskogee, OK*

SOSH, originally the Student Optometric Services to Haiti, was founded by Dr. Algernon Phillips in 1968 with the sole mission of providing eye-care to the people of the poorest nation in the northern hemisphere. SOSH would continue this mission year after year until 1986 when political unrest would force SOSH from Haitian soil. Following that SOSH would travel to Mexico, Guatemala, and other countries in need of eye care. But SOSH was originally established to provide eye care to Haiti and returning might have been a dream to many past SOSH officers.

In March 2008 four officers from SOSH traveled with VOSH Pa and SEE International back to Cap-Haitien to provide eye care to the people of Haiti. This marked the first time in over 20 years that SOSH set foot on Haitian soil. Getting to Haiti was an adventure in itself. As Haiti is not a popular tourist destination, flights to Haiti only originate from the southern tip of Florida. These flights leaving Florida to Haiti are from small charter airlines that fly small propeller driven planes. These were easily the smallest planes that most of the four officers had been on. Landing was another adventure, as the landing strip when it came into view was only half paved. Haiti is still widely considered one of the only third world countries in the northern hemisphere. Cap-Haitien was a startling display of local wonder. Open markets with the ocean in view, houses fashioned from concrete or mud with a steel roof, and craftsmen working with metal or wood to create art. There is definitely a French flare to the artwork and to the local architecture, which isn't surprising given the strong French influence throughout Haiti's history. While there is a western influence much is done without modern machinery. On one side of the street you'll see a modern crane putting together a wall, while on the other side a single man with a wheelbarrow will be putting up another wall.

Our lodging and meals were provided by Living Hope Missions (LHM), a mission that had a longstanding history of hosting humanitarian missions. Lodging was provided by LHM and fresh food was prepared daily with a bit of Haitian flare. The sites the team worked at were initially scouted by the LHM both for the population that could benefit the most from our work and also security. The work that LHM performed even before the team touched down in Haiti was indispensable as the mission knew the populations that would benefit the most and the local transportation difficulties as well. LHM also had a close relationship with the local hospital, Justinien. This allowed referrals to flow from the work sites back to Justinien for cataract surgery.

A patient I will never forget was a young girl who was brought into one of our clinics with what appeared to have pre-septal cellulitis, but without imaging we could only guess how close to orbital cellulitis it could be. We had a very limited supply of oral antibiotics that we supplied to the family and asked that they return to our site the next morning. By the next morning much of the swelling had abated and by the time we had left the site the next day this little girl was running and playing with her sisters and brothers. After working for a week with VOSH Pa and SEE International it became apparent that Haiti was once again viable for SOSH's return.

September 19th through September 29th 2008 SOSH returned to Haiti with 22 members, 2 preceptors, and two members from SEE International to bring SOSH back to Haiti. Logistically planning a trip this large was a

challenge. This group would be over double the amount of people that had traveled with VOSH Pa in March. In fact the group was so large that in order to get everyone to Haiti we had to stagger the flights by a day since we could not fit the entire team into one plane.

SOSH continued to work closely with LHM and the Justinien relying on their local knowledge of villages that would benefit the most from our care. Almost as important was their local knowledge of the land and how difficult it would be to get to the sites, and how difficult it would be to get our patients to the Justinien from the sites.

Over 2,500 new readers, 2,500 new sunglasses, and hundreds of recycled spectacles from Lion's Club accompanied SOSH to Haiti. This would mark the first time in SOSH's history that SOSH would be utilizing new spectacles in lieu of using all recycled spectacles. A grant was also secured through Alcon for topical antibiotics, topical steroids, and artificial tears. The decision was made early on in planning to not include glaucoma medications, as we did not feel that topical glaucoma medications could be viable. Most of the supply of spectacles would reach Haiti before the group would arrive and LHM was again instrumental in sourcing how to ship our supplies as well as securing them when they arrived.

All medications as well as the YAG would travel into the country with our group. This was a big worry to me as we were technically carrying medications that we thus far did not have the credentials to carry. And as we were checking the YAG laser into the airport one of my officers and myself realized we actually had no idea if there really was a YAG laser inside these two heavy cases other than being told it contained the YAG. Interestingly enough it seemed that security was more interested in our handheld instruments than anything else. It is somewhat amusing to look back into the security area and see most of our 22 members being asked to assemble and turn on the handhelds.

Our host at the Mont Joli Nicolas Bussenius was the son of Walter Bussenius, the original owner when SOSH visited in the 70's and 80's. A gift brought back to Walter was an original letter found in the SOSH room from Walter written on parchment to the then president of SOSH regarding the upcoming trip in 1984. Walter had told himself that in 1986 when SOSH left Haitian soil that it would probably be the last he'd see of SOSH, I was happy to be one of the first SOSH members he'd seen in over 20 years.

SOSH set out to run twin sites, one set up by LHM and one set up by the Justinien, splitting the 20 total members (minus two to witness surgery at the hospital) and 2 preceptors among the sites. At the sites a detailed history was taken, followed by a VA, followed by an IOP (an I-Care tonometer purchased jointly by Lion's club and SOSH), followed by retinoscopy, direct ophthalmoscopy, and a trip to the optical or referrals to the Justinien for either cataracts, pterygium, or surgery. Patients that fit the referral criteria were seen one day and then operated on the next day. Security at the sites was a concern of mine, but turned out to be a non-issue. LHM and the Justinien had their interpreters and drivers setup to monitor the crowds and if they felt that things might have been getting slightly out of hand we simply stopped working. Once the crowd realized what was happening they worked their differences out quickly. Throughout the trip LHM and Justinien always had my consent to pull the plug on any site that they felt was becoming too hot to handle.

Transportation to and from the sites were at times colorful. From fitting the entire group into an open air dump truck to stuffing as much equipment and people into a tap-tap (hired taxi), or being asked to get into a truck full of gasoline. However, we fared much better than many of our patients. Many of our patients walked at times barefoot miles to make it to our clinics. One of our patients arrived hoping for help but it was not help we could provide. The patient likely had congestive heart failure given how swollen his lower extremities were. Even

worse, our translator mentioned that the patient had been walking since very early in the morning to reach our site. On our way back to our lodgings that evening we found him on the road walking back to his village. We offered him a ride, and only then did we realize how far he had walked. Even by truck several miles had to be covered before our patient was returned home.

This was hard work. I'm sure that most members can attest to the fact that the days were grueling. Getting up at 6:30 for breakfast and on the trucks at 7:30 for an hour to two hour drive to the sites, working until lunch, and then working until 4:30-5:00 pm. Sadly with this schedule not many of us ventured out to even try the Mont Joli's pool.

On Friday we held a huge site with all 20 members and 2 preceptors at one site. This was the only site that I was actually asking the hosts to find more patients and we were considering the possibility of not returning on Saturday and trying to see everyone Friday. I was then told that we didn't have anyone else to see, and that Saturday's group would not be able to make it on such a short notice, as many had to travel to this site. So Saturday would be a voluntary day. It turned out it didn't need to be, as everyone showed up to complete the last 100 patients at the site.

Of the days that we were in Haiti only one day was planned for sightseeing, and that was was the first day in country to visit the ruins of the Citadelle Laferriere. The last day before leaving Haiti was designated to prepare for the trip back to Pennsylvania. However, Nicholas at the Mont Joli had planned a treat for us. As a surprise, Nicholas took us to one of the hidden beaches in Haiti, Labadee. Labadee can only be reached by water and is utilized mostly by cruise ships that dock briefly. Labadee has a beautiful white sand beach with crystal clear water that extended out from the coast. It was a huge contrast to everything that we had seen while working in Haiti. In one of the poorest nations in the northern hemisphere, we found one of the most beautiful beaches we had ever seen.

In the end SOSH saw over 2,400 patients in 6 days. However, this trip should be not judged based solely on numbers. In a country of millions, 2,400 people is a small measure of success, what this trip hopefully accomplished was the realization of the world. We live in bubble kept away from so much of the world. The SOSH trip brings members into direct contact with cultures and classes they may never see again. If the trip serves to open one's eyes to the desperation and poor out in the world and the impact even only 24 people can have, then it has ultimately succeeded. These trips done correctly should change you as a doctor and ultimately change you as who you are and how you see the world.

The two videos were made up of photos and video taken by everyone in the team. Upon returning from the trip I had a total of 8 gigs of photos from all the members that we made available to all the members on two DVDs. I wanted to create something that we all could look back on for memories.

One of the videos was done as a work video to promote SOSH's work. The other video was a fun video that was taken from funny pictures or videos during the trip, a less serious video if you will.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Haqn3qptY7U>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLnYBAGLmb8>

As this article was going to press I realized that I never got a chance to correct the name of one of the members that I managed to misspell in the video credits Diana Zhang is incorrectly spelled Dianna

Welcome New VA Optometry Residents

The NAVAQ would like to congratulate all the VA optometry residency supervisors that worked so hard earlier this year in order to secure qualified candidates for their residency positions. VA optometry residents started on July 1st and have now completed their first quarter. We look forward to an exciting and educational year.

1. Abbott, Catherine – Salem VAMC, Salem, VA
2. Bruce, Emily – Jack C. Montgomery VAMC, Muskogee, OK
3. Campagna, Astrid – VA Connecticut, West Haven Campus
4. Case, Barry – Lake City VA, Lake City, FL
5. Chan, Daphne – Salt Lake City VA, Salt Lake City, UT
6. Cho, Sarah – Cincinnati VA Eye Clinic, Cincinnati, OH
7. Ciampa, Sarah – VA Maine Health Care, Bangor, ME
8. Colpitt, Jessica – Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks, Fayetteville, AR
9. Cuan, Melissa – VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, Montrose, NY
10. Dang, Jennifer – VA Southern Nevada Health Care System, North Las Vegas, NV

11. Dunn, Amber – Roseburg VA, Roseburg, OR
12. Fasano, Alyssa – White River Junction VA, White River Junction, VT
13. Fisher, Brian – Lake City VAMC, Lake City, FL
14. Gore, Sarah -
15. Grounds, Kelsey – Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks, Fayetteville, AR
16. Henry, Jennifer – VA San Diego Health Care System, San Diego, CA
17. Hill, Katherine – Togus VAMC, Augusta, ME
18. Kajoshaj, Fikret – VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, Montrose, NY
19. Klein, Nicole –VA Northern Indiana Health Care System, Fort Wayne, IN
20. Klute, Kyle – Battle Creek VAMC, Battle Creek, MI
21. Koetting, Cecelia – Cincinnati VAMC, Cincinnati, OH
22. Krzyanowski, Natasha
23. Kumari, Rajni – Wilmington VAMC, Wilmington, DE
24. LaBuda, Caryn – Marion VA, Marion, IL
25. Lee, Anne – VA Southern Nevada Health Care System, North Las Vegas, NV
26. Ly, Son – VA Southern Nevada Health Care System, North Las Vegas, NV
27. Mu, Andy – Baltimore VA, Baltimore, MD
28. Ngo, Andrew – VA San Diego Health Care System, San Diego, CA
29. Nguyen, Theresa – Albuquerque VAMC, Albuquerque, NM
30. Parsons, Mark – Wilmington VAMC, Wilmington, DE
31. Pietrasik, Rebecca – VA Connecticut West Haven Campus
32. Pollard, Kendra – Minneapolis VAMC, Minneapolis, MN
33. Ramirez, Natalie – Southern Nevada Health Care System, North Las Vegas, NV
34. Rao, Amoolya – VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, Montrose, NY

35. Sipola, Matthew – Battle Creek VAMC, Battle Creek, MI
36. Stronz, Lindsay – VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, Montrose, NY
37. Suk, Dong – James H. Quillen VAMC, Mountain Home, TN
38. Wedeking, Cassandra – West Haven VA, West Haven, CT
39. Wu, Eva – San Diego VAMC, San Diego, CA

2013 Continuing Education

Continuing Education Hyperlinks

October 2013

[East West Eye Conference. Cleveland, Ohio. October 3-6](#)

[Connecticut Association of Optometrists Annual Conference. Groton, CT. October 5 -7](#)

[SCCO Glaucoma Pearls for Glaucoma Certified ODs. SCCO Campus. October 6](#)

[College of Optometrists in Vision Development 43rd Annual Meeting. Orlando, FL. October 8 - 12](#)

[New Technology & Treatment in Vision Care East Coast. Philadelphia, PA. Nov 22-24](#)

[Wisconsin Optometric Association Northwoods Education Event. Hayward, WI. October 11-12](#)

[Iowa Optometric Association Hawkeye Institute. Cedar Rapids, IA. October 17 -18](#)

[Pioneers in Optometry Regional Conference. Tulsa, OK. Oct 18 - 20](#)

[CE in Italy. Florence, Italy. October 19 -21](#)

[CE in Italy. Tuscany Italy. October 23-25](#)

[American Academy of Optometry 2013. Seattle, WA. October 23 -26](#)

November 2013

[2013 CE Charleston. Historic Charleston, SC. Nov 8 - 9](#)

[Wisconsin Optometric Association Primary Care Symposium. Waukesha, WI. Nov 9 - 10](#)

[SCCO Clinical Topics in Optometry. SCCO Campus. November 10](#)

[New Technology & Treatments in Vision Care East Coast. Westin Alexandria, Virginia. Nov 22 - 24](#)

[Indiana University School of Optometry Louisville Seminar. Louisville, KY. November 10.](#)

NAVAO Committees

The **Executive Committee** is responsible for the management of the business of the NAVAO and advises the President on all policy matters of the Association. The Executive Committee consists of the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Immediate Past President.

Executive Committee Members:

- Brian S. Kawasaki, O.D., M.B.A. (President and Chair)
- David G. Storer, O.D. (Vice-President)
- Janel L. Chou, O.D. (Secretary)
- Makesha Sink, O.D. (Treasurer)
- Gay K. Tokumar, O.D. (Immediate Past President)

The **Finance Committee** monitors funds and assists the Treasurer in the collection and disbursements of funds. The committee also projects future financial demands and sources for the Association.

Finance Committee Members:

- Makesha Sink, O.D. (Treasurer and Chair)
- Weon Jun, O.D.
- Michael McGovern, O.D.
- Glenn Saxon, O.D.

The **Membership Committee** recommends means for membership retention and growth and monitors pertinent data about the membership.

Membership Committee Members:

- Katherine L. Wang, O.D. (Membership Director and Chair)
- Amber Louprasong, O.D. (newly appointed Vice-Chair)
- Janel L. Chou, O.D. (Executive Committee Liaison)
- Rachel Caywood, O.D.
- Meghan Elkins, O.D.
- Joy A Kerns, O.D.
- Rebecca Kline, O.D.
- Susie L. Lim, O.D.
- David N. Lynne, O.D.
- Margaret Mannion, O.D.

The **Events Committee** is responsible for planning and overseeing all NAVAO functions, including the annual NAVAO Business Meeting, Reception, and Dinner.

Events Committee Members:

- Minna Huang, O.D. (Director of Events and Chair)
- David G. Storer, O.D. (Executive Committee Liaison)
- Katherine L. Wang, O.D.
- Nancy Wong, O.D., Ph.D.

The **Newsletter Committee** is responsible for maintaining a formal communications link with the membership and assists the Newsletter Editor with publishing the quarterly NAVAO Newsletter.

Newsletter Committee:

- Dawn N. Tomasini, O.D. (Newsletter Editor and Chair)
- Brian S. Kawasaki, O.D., M.B.A. (Executive Committee Liaison)
- Paul Grusso, O.D.
- Phillip K. Haiman, O.D.
- Michelle Chen Lynch, O.D.
- Joseph A. Pruitt, O.D.
- Melissa M. Walters, O.D.

The **Technology Committee** is responsible for communicating with the membership via online technology. The Committee will maintain the NAVAIO website, make suggestions for its improvement or enhancement, and conduct events requiring technological support as directed by the Executive Committee.

- Kevin Mercado, O.D. (Director of Technology and Chair)
- Brian S. Kawasaki, O.D., M.B.A. (Executive Committee Liaison)
- Jason Powell, O.D.
- Danielle Weiler, O.D.
- Brett Zwolensky, O.D.