

Optimum VA



The Official Newsletter of the
National Association of Veterans Affairs Optometrists

Summer 2012

NAVAO Board Members

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

President

brian.kawasaki@navao.org

David G. Storer, O.D.

Vice-President

david.storer@navao.org

Janel L. Chou, O.D.

Secretary

janel.chou@navao.org

Makesha Sink, O.D.

Treasurer

makesha.sink@navao.org

Gay K. Tokumaru, O.D.

Immediate Past President

gay.tokumaru@navao.org

Katherine L. Wang, O.D.

Membership Director

katherine.wang@navao.org

Dawn N. Tomasini, O.D.

Newsletter Editor

dawn.tomasini@navao.org

Minna Huang, O.D.

Member-at-Large (Director of Events)

minna.huang@navao.org

Kevin Mercado, O.D.

Member -at-Large (Director of Technology)

kevin.mercado@navao.org

Issue Highlights

[President's Column](#)

[Updates from the NAVAO Board](#)

[TSP Overview for Optometrists](#)

[One VA, Many Different Optometry Clinics](#)

[Continuing Education](#)

[Member News](#)

Optimum VA Newsletter is a quarterly publication distributed in January, April, July and October.

Deadline for submissions are 12/31, 3/31, 6/30, and 9/30 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,

I would like to thank all of you who responded to our 2012 Member Survey. Your input is greatly appreciated and will be valuable as we make future plans for our organization. A change that we will be implementing soon based upon member feedback from this survey and past post-dinner meeting surveys is the format of our annual meeting. As you know, we have been very fortunate to be able to hold our annual event in conjunction with the annual American Academy of Optometry (AAO) meeting for several years now; however, due to changes in AAO scheduling rules, we have pushed back the start time of our dinner to later in the evening for recent meetings. Due to this later start time, review of attendance at past meetings, and survey feedback from members who attend the annual meeting, we will be trying a new format this year. It will consist of the Business Meeting to include a VA Optometry update from the Director of the VA Optometry Service, followed by a reception with heavy hors d'œuvres and drinks (attendees will be provided drink tickets). Following the reception, attendees will gather for brief remarks from the NAVAO President and a keynote speaker address. The evening will conclude with a dessert buffet and coffee where attendees can once again mingle and socialize. The annual meeting registration fee will also be lowered this year. A post-meeting survey will be conducted once again this year to determine the success of our new format. We thank you again for your feedback and your willingness to try something new this year.

Our 2012 annual meeting is currently scheduled for the evening of Thursday, October 25, 2012 at the Hyatt Regency Phoenix in conjunction with the upcoming American Academy of Optometry Meeting. Tentatively, the Business Meeting (members only) will be held from 7:00-7:45 PM and will be immediately followed by the reception and program at 7:45 PM. More details will be posted to our website as the date gets closer. We look forward to seeing you in Phoenix!

Finally, as we reach mid-year, I would also like to thank our Board Members and Committee Members who have been continuously working towards improving our association, in addition to juggling the demands of their regular job duties! As an all-volunteer organization, we are dependent on the active participation of our members and the many hours they devote to the NAVAO.

Sincerely,

Brian

From the Editor

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



Summer months at the VA are always busy. While many of us have been undergoing the switchover of fourth quarter interns for new first quarter ones and have been orientating new residents, the NAVAIO newsletter committee has been hard at work for the past few months putting together this edition which emphasizes our differences in clinical design. While speaking with members of our committee, it became striking how differently each of our VA's operate; some with residents, some without; some with opticians, some without. We decided to highlight these differences so that we can all become aware of the different ways to operate an optometry clinic under the confines of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Seeing what works in another clinic may boost efficiency in another.

In addition, Michelle T. Chen Lynch has provided us all with a valuable tool in this issue. She has summarized the workings of our Thrift Savings Plan. For those of use that are not financially savvy, she provides a basic guide to saving for retirement under the TSP system. Although retirement may seem far away, the planning takes years and in these uncertain economic times, it is well worth reviewing your retirement investments in the VA. Look for our explanation of other benefits in future issues.

We would also like to begin highlighting individual members in our Member News section of the newsletter. We will start to randomly contact members and request a brief bio as a sort of introduction to the other members of the NAVAIO. We look forward to getting to know the individual members that make up our organization and provide exceptional eye care for our nation's veterans.

Please feel free to send any comments or suggestions to dawn.tomasini@navao.org.

Updates from the NAVAIO Board

David G. Storer, O.D.

VICE-PRESIDENT



Hot summer months, but at NAVAIO the Board members remain at the helm, working on a number of important projects. All of your NAVAIO Board Members are gearing up and laying the foundational plans for this fall's business meeting and the annual NAVAIO dinner meeting that has been scheduled for the evening of Thursday, October 25, in conjunction with the American Academy of Optometry Meeting in Phoenix, AZ. Heading up this effort is Dr. Minna Huang, NAVAIO's Director of Events. Dr. Huang is Dr. Kawasaki's right hand in this effort and is again

putting in many long hours in preparing to make this year's event a success. She does not receive nearly enough recognition for all of the detailed work and the effort that she puts into each year's preparations for the annual NAVAO dinner. We on the Board deeply appreciate all of her efforts, dedication and the time that she contributes to NAVAO.

Dr. Kawasaki is spearheading the Board's effort to review the recent online member survey regarding important aspects of our organization. You should be hearing from the Dr. Kawasaki soon on changes derived from your comments that will impact NAVAO. The Board deeply appreciates the time that each of the NAVAO members who participated in the survey provided to this effort – we know you are each busy with your own lives and deeply appreciate your willingness to help improve NAVAO. I can share with you that Dr. Kawasaki has been encouraged by the results as he has been going through the data to see how the membership feedback can best utilized by the Board to improve how we do business.

The Board would like to thank to those members who either renewed their membership, or joined for the first time, in 2012. Each year our Membership Director, Dr. Kathy Wang and her committee, spearheads the annual membership drive. Their efforts are invaluable to maintaining the strength of NAVAO. As we have mentioned before, a strong membership allows our President, Dr. Brian Kawasaki, supported by the NAVAO Executive Committee, to speak with a strong unified voice for VA optometry in forums where NAVAO interests are represented. We would continue to encourage those VA optometrists who have not yet joined or renewed their NAVAO membership in 2012, consider joining, and participating in NAVAO. We would also ask that our current members encourage other optometrists at their facilities to join NAVAO for the same reason. Year around, current or former members can go to the home page of the NAVAO website and click on the "Join Us" button in the menu bar at the top left side of the page.

As I have mentioned in the past regarding membership -- our long-term goal remains 100% NAVAO membership by VA optometrists and we will continue to make every effort to convince VA optometrists who are not presently active NAVAO members that we truly do represent all of VA optometry's interests in many areas that impact our profession.

On a personal note, I mentioned last year that I personally participated in a medical mission to Haiti in May 2011. I have been granted the opportunity this coming January to participate in another medical mission that will include eye care. This year's mission will be to Guyana, South America. As I mentioned last year, I was deeply impressed by struggles of the Haitian people and the dignity and the resolve of those patients whom I was granted the opportunity to serve in the Jacmel clinic. I look forward to the opportunity to serve the people of Guyana this year.

I would like to again personally thank the NAVAO membership for your unwavering support for the Executive Committee. The summer months ahead, represent a period of intense planning for everyone on the Executive Committee, for the upcoming fall events at this year's Academy meeting. We look forward to seeing each of you at our annual meeting and dinner.

In closing, I would like to again issue a personal invitation to the membership to please let us know if there is any area that you believe requires more attention from your Board. I can assure you that you will receive an immediate response to your queries and suggestions. To reach the Board simply go to the home page of the NAVAO website and click on the "Contact Us" button in the menu bar at the top left side of the page.

The entire Board is looking forward to an active and productive summer, leading into the fall NAVAIO activities at this year's Academy meeting and dinner. The Board sends it's best wishes to the membership and we look forward to seeing each of you in Phoenix.

Janel L. Chou, O.D.

SECRETARY



Hello members! Summer is here and with the change in the weather so is the constant changes at the VAMC. Keep up to date with everything through the website in the conference call minutes section. Secure messaging is a new addition to add communication between Veterans and their providers. A new workgroup has formed for compensation and pension providers and there is a new matching service for optometric residencies. There is also, now, a one source document site that has been created for standard operating procedures for reusable medical equipment. Don't forget to check out all the new directives and updated handbooks that are available as well. We look forward to seeing you all at the annual business meeting in Phoenix this year! If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at janel.chou@va.gov and try and stay cool!!



Makesha Sink, O.D.

TREASURER

I don't know what summers are like in your area of the country but it is pretty hot here in Virginia! We are also heating things up with NAVAIO in preparation for the upcoming annual meeting and reception/dinner. The finance committee has been working on putting old records in a digital format, finishing up a successful membership drive, and looking ahead at planning the budget for 2013! I hope most of you will be able to attend the meeting this year and hear the exciting changes that NAVAIO has been implementing and looking ahead for the future. Please let me or any of the other finance committee members know if you have any suggestions for the budget for 2013 for ways that we can not only improve NAVAIO, but also VA optometry!

I also hope you all had a large tax return this year and here is a quick financial tip of the day: Put any extra change you have in a big jar. Once a year, empty it out, roll the change and take it to the bank. You'll be amazed at how much you have saved!

Gay K. Tokumaru, O.D.

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT



NO UPDATES AT THIS TIME

Katherine L. Wang, O.D.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR



The NAVAO membership committee would like to welcome the following optometrists that were hired by the VA in the past few months:

- Mark Street - Coatesville VA
- Gulshan Karamchandani – Brooklyn VA
- Kelsey Bloch-Livengood – Little Rock VA
- Kristin Wilson – Minneapolis VA
- Eric Reinhard – Cincinnati VA
- Debra McConnaha – Indianapolis VA

These newly hired VA optometrists will receive a free NAVAO membership for the calendar year of their hire.

Minna Huang, O.D.

MEMBER-AT-LARGE (Director of Events)



NO UPDATES AT THIS TIME

TSP Overview for Optometrists

By Michelle T. Chen Lynch

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is a retirement savings and investment plan established by Congress in 1986 to offer the similar types of tax savings and benefits to Federal employees, comparable to the 401K in private institutions. TSP is one of 3 parts of the retirement package offered by the Federal Employee's Retirement System (FERS), which also includes the FERS basic annuity and social security. If a Federal employee is under the civil service (CSRS) or is a member of the uniformed services, then the TSP is a supplement to the CSRS annuity or military retired pay.

Advantages of TSP:

- Automatic payroll deductions (“pay yourself first”)
- Diversified investment options, including lifecycle funds that are professionally designed to match an employee’s retirement time horizon
- Traditional contributions come from pre-tax earnings and the investment earnings are tax-deferred. Roth contributions are after-tax earnings and are tax-free when withdrawn (if IRS requirements are met). You must participate in the Roth option for 5 years to obtain the benefits and this is a new option being implemented in TSP, with more details to come.

- Low administrative and investment cost to maintain, less than 0.03% in annual costs compared to about 2% for the majority of 401K plans. This means that more of your contribution dollars are working for you in investments rather than in general account maintenance or upkeep.
- Beneficiary participant account established for spouse or other designated survivor in the event of federal employee death
- Money is accessible under special circumstances while employed by a federal agency
- Automatic agency contribution: Under FERS and employee contributions, 1% of basic pay is received automatically
- Matching contribution: Eligible to receive up to 4% if covered under FERS by contributing 5% of the employee's salary each pay period. This is free money! When the agency automatic contributions (1%) is added to the matching contributions, the employee doubles their 5% investment instantly. The agency automatic contributions are not taken out of the employee's pay and do not decrease the dollar amount of pay for income tax purposes or Social Security.
- Several withdrawal options

Matching Contributions and Automatic Agency Contributions:

In the matching contribution, the first 3% is matched dollar for dollar. The next 2% is matched \$0.50 per dollar. Contributions above 5% are not matched, and employees are still encouraged to contribute over 5% if possible. If the employee stops making contributions, the automatic agency contributions stop, too.

In order to get the maximum agency matching contributions, the employee must designate 5% of basic pay each pay period into the TSP and must contribute all year long. If the IRS annual limit is reached before the end of the year, the contributions (and agency matching contributions) will stop. Therefore, if it is preferable to contribute larger sums earlier in the year, avoid reaching the elective deferral limit too early so not to miss out on the valuable agency matching contributions.

Agency Contributions to Your Account (FERS Employees Only)

You put in:	Your agency puts in:		And the total contribution is:
	Automatic (1%) Contribution	Agency Matching Contribution	
0%	1%	0%	1%
1%	1%	1%	3%
2%	1%	2%	5%
3%	1%	3%	7%
4%	1%	3.5%	8.5%
5%	1%	4%	10%
More than 5%	1%	4%	Your contribution + 5%

Source: <https://www.tsp.gov/planparticipation/eligibility/typesOfContributions.shtml>

As of July 31, 2010, new employees are automatically enrolled in TSP and eligible for automatic agency contributions, as they must opt-out if they do not want to participate. Three percent of basic pay is allocated to the G fund for new employees, but there is an option to make changes to the allocation in the TSP account online. Employees are encouraged to increase their contributions up to 5% of their basic pay to maximize matching contributions. There is no waiting period to receive them.

Automatic agency contributions are subject to vesting rules, which means that an employee is entitled to keep the agency automatic contributions, and any other earnings he/she accrues, after a certain period of federal employment (3 years for optometrists). Therefore, if an employee departs federal service before the vesting period is over, the automatic agency contributions and earnings are forfeited to TSP. If an employee dies before termination from federal employment, that employee is automatically vested in all of the earnings in his/her account.

Employee Contributions:

There are 2 types of contributions, regular employee contributions from basic pay (which includes the automatic agency match) and catch up contributions.

The Internal Revenue Code (IRC) places a limit on the maximum contribution in a calendar year, called the elective deferral limit. This applies to the combined total of the tax-deferred traditional contributions and Roth contributions. The IRC elective deferral limit can change annually, with announcements made on the TSP website and other publications. This limit does not include the automatic agency contributions or the agency matching contributions. For 2012, the elective deferral limit is \$17,000 for the entire year.

Catch-up contributions are voluntary payroll deductions for participants older than 50 years old, in addition to regular employee contributions. There are no matching contributions for catch-up contributions. These can be either traditional pre-tax or Roth after-tax. To be eligible, the participant must already be contributing an amount that will reach the IRC elective deferral limit by the end of the year. During the year the participant turns 50, catch-up contributions can be made at any time and each pay period, the agency or service will make the contribution to TSP from pay in an amount selected by the employee. Catch-up contributions automatically stop when the IRC catch-up contribution limit is met or at the end of the calendar year, whichever comes first. The IRC catch-up contribution limit is \$5,500 for 2012. A new election must be made for each calendar year because catch-up contributions do not continue automatically.

Investing in the TSP:

There are 2 approaches to money investment in the TSP

1. The L Funds – (L)ifecycle funds that are invested professionally according to a mix of stocks, bonds and government securities. The L fund is selected based on the time horizon, or future date at which a participant plans to withdraw money. This may be appealing to those who do not have the time, experience or interest to manage their TSP savings and allows for portfolio diversification amongst all of the TSP funds. Participants with longer time horizons can tolerate more risk while seeking higher returns and the lifecycle funds will automatically adjust to reflect a lower ability to sustain risk as the investment time horizon approaches.
2. Individual funds – the participant makes the decisions about the investment mix by choosing any or all of the individual TSP investment funds (G, F, C, S and I Funds). Four of the 5 options allows for exposure to the entire US stock market, most of the international stock market and the US aggregate bond market.

Comparison of TSP Funds:

	G Fund	F Fund*	C Fund*	S Fund*	I Fund*	L Funds**
Description of Investments	Government securities (specially issued to the TSP)	Government, corporate, and mortgage-backed bonds	Stocks of large and medium-sized U.S. companies	Stocks of small to medium-sized U.S. companies (not included in the C Fund)	International stocks of 21 developed countries	Invested in the G, F, C, S, and I Funds
Objective of Fund	Interest income without risk of loss of principal	To match the performance of the Barclays Capital U.S. Aggregate Bond Index	To match the performance of the Standard & Poor's 500 (S&P 500) Index	To match the performance of the Dow Jones U.S. Completion TSM Index	To match the performance of the Morgan Stanley Capital International EAFE (Europe, Australasia, Far East) Index	To provide professionally diversified portfolios based on various time horizons, using the G, F, C, S, and I Funds
Risk	Inflation risk	Market risk, Credit risk, Prepayment risk, Inflation risk	Market risk, Inflation risk	Market risk, Inflation risk	Market risk, Currency risk, Inflation risk	Exposed to all of the types of risk to which the individual TSP funds are exposed - but total risk is reduced through diversification among the five individual funds
Volatility	Low	Low to moderate	Moderate	Moderate to high — historically more volatile than C Fund	Moderate to high — historically more volatile than C Fund	Asset allocation shifts as time horizon approaches to reduce volatility
Types of Earnings***	Interest	Change in market prices Interest	Change in market prices Dividends	Change in market prices Dividends	Change in market prices Change in relative value of currency Dividends	Composite of earnings in the underlying funds
2010 Administrative Expenses****	0.025%	0.025%	0.025%	0.024%	0.025%	0.025%
Inception Date	04/01/87	01/29/88	01/29/88	05/01/01	05/01/01	08/01/05

* The F, C, S, and I Funds also have earnings from securities lending income and from temporary investments in G Fund securities. These amounts represent a very small portion of total earnings.

** Each of the L Funds is invested in the individual TSP funds (G, F, C, S, and I). The proportion of your L Fund balance invested in each of the individual TSP funds depends on the L Fund you choose.

*** Income from interest and dividends is included in the share price calculation. It is not paid directly to participants' accounts.

**** Expenses are offset by the forfeitures of Agency Automatic (1%) contributions of FERS employees who leave Federal Service before they are vested, other forfeitures, and loan fees.

Source: <https://www.tsp.gov/investmentfunds/fundsoverview/comparisonMatrix.shtml>

Fund risks:

Consider both risk and return. Over time, the F, C, S and I funds have a higher potential return than the G fund, but also a higher risk of investment loss, which the G fund does not. Conversely, investing entirely in the G fund will not provide enough of a return to keep up with inflation or to meet one's retirement financial needs for the long term.

Be comfortable with the amount of risk and choose accordingly. An investment comfort zone includes using a long-term strategy to avoid chasing market returns during upswings or abandoning one's investment strategy during downswings.

Dollar cost averaging (DCA) – rather than predict the market highs and lows, another option is to invest the same amount of money in a mutual fund at regular intervals over a lengthy period of time. This will only work if it is a long range plan, hence the word “averaging,” and requires patience and persistence. Even if other investors are exiting the market because it is low or trying to gain entry when it is high, the same set amount of investment must be contributed at the regular intervals, remaining slow and steady.

Diversify the portfolio to reduce the overall risk as there are 5 individual TSP funds to select from, in addition to a Lifecycle fund that will do the diversification for you, so the investment options vary. That way, you are not “putting all of your eggs in one basket.”

The amount of risk one can sustain is dependent upon the investment time horizon. The more time there is before needing to withdraw from the account, the more risk one can take because early losses can be offset by later gains.

Periodically review your investment choices. Check the diversification of your account balance among the funds to make sure the mix is still appropriate for your circumstances. If not, rebalance the account to get the proper allocations by making an interfund transfer.

Calculations on your savings growth can be made here:

<https://www.tsp.gov/planningtools/retirementplanning/howMuchWillGrow.shtml#result>

Consider this: A new residency trained optometrist entering VA employment at age 30, starting with a salary of \$89,450, enrolls in TSP and only contributes 5% of basic pay (\$4472.00 total, or \$172.02 per pay period) during all 30 years of service, with a 6% annual rate of return, will yield \$683,182.00. While this may not be enough to retire on alone, depending on standards of living, this is a fairly non-aggressive approach where the optometrist contributed enough just to get the matching contributions and a modest investment return. If this same optometrist contributes 15% of basic pay (\$13,417.50 total, or \$516.06 per pay period – not hitting the IRC elective deferral limit), the total savings growth will yield \$1,242,149.00. These calculations do not include the increase in salary or promotions over time for an optometrist that would also increase the dollar amount of 5% basic pay contributions and matching. Also, depending on the selection of TSP funds, the return can be much more than 6%.

Withdrawals after departing federal service:

Contributions can no longer be added after federal separation. There are a few options to consider with regards to your TSP account:

- If the vested account balance is less than \$200, TSP will automatically cash out your account and send you a check for the entire amount as this money cannot stay in TSP.

- If the vested account balance is \$200 or more, then the employee can leave the money with TSP until the account withdrawal deadline. Even after separation from federal service, you are considered a TSP participant if the account remains with TSP. You are no longer a TSP participant when you have withdrawn all of your money out.

Combining accounts – money (from other employment accounts, not personal accounts) can also be transferred into the TSP to help simplify your financial life and still maintain the low administrative costs while being able to do change the investment mix through interfund transfers. Certain restrictions do apply. Alternatively, the money in your TSP account can be transferred to another account like an IRA or other eligible employer plan. Keep in mind that the other plans might have higher administrative costs, which in turn means that this is another dollar less that could be working for you, which is instead going towards upkeep.

- Partial withdrawal – \$1,000 or more can be taken out while leaving the rest in the account to decide what to do with it later.
- Full withdrawal – choose how the entire account will be distributed using one or any combination of 3 withdrawal options:
 1. Single payment – withdraw the entire TSP account in one payment, or lump sum.
 2. Series of TSP monthly payments – set up withdrawals from the TSP account that will be paid monthly. A specific dollar amount, no less than \$25, may be selected or TSP can calculate a monthly payment based on life expectancy. Once a year, the participant has the opportunity to cease monthly payments and switch to a single payment, or select a change to the dollar amount distributed per month.
 3. Life annuity purchased for participant by TSP – an annuity pays a benefit to the participant (or designated survivor) every month for life. TSP purchases the annuity for the participant from a private insurance company. The amount for annuity purchase must be \$3,500 or more. There are 3 types of basic annuity:
 - a. Single life annuity – paid only to participant during lifetime
 - b. Joint life annuity with spouse – paid to participant and spouse while alive. If one member dies, payments are made to the survivor for the remainder of his/her life
 - c. Joint life annuity with someone (aside from spouse) who has insurable interest in participant – paid to participant and the other designated person while alive. If one member dies, payments are made to the survivor for the remainder of his/her life.

The joint annuities allow a 50% or 100% payment option to the survivor. There are other options to choose from as well, depending on the type of annuity chosen and involvement of a spouse.

Taxes on Withdrawals after Federal service separation:

Federal income taxes must be paid on taxable portions of withdrawals when they are paid directly to the participant. Taxes are owed on the portion of withdrawal that comes out of the traditional balance. The tax-deferred status can be maintained on the traditional portion of the withdrawal by transferring it to a traditional IRA or eligible employer plan (transfer to a Roth IRA is also possible, but taxes would need to be paid on the year of the transfer). Federal income taxes are not paid on the portion of the withdrawal that comes from Roth contributions. Depending on the age of separation from Federal service, as well as withdrawal options and timing, you may be subject to the IRS early withdrawal penalty tax.

Account withdrawal deadline:

TSP participants are required to start withdrawing money by April 1 of the following year either:

- The year the participant turns 70.5 years of age, if separated from Federal employment or uniformed services or
- The year of separation from Federal employment if already 70.5 years

If money has not yet begun to be withdrawn by the deadline, the account balance will be forfeited to TSP. Although this balance can be reclaimed, the earnings from the time it was forfeited cannot be reclaimed.

IRS Required Minimum Distribution: at the same deadline as above, you are subject to the IRS required minimum distribution rules, which require you to receive a certain amount of your account each year based on life expectancy.

Planning for retirement does take quite a bit of planning and while it may be best to start early, latecomers can also still manage to be financially secure by taking the time to understand the options available and to take advantage of the benefits to invest wisely. However, it is never too early to start setting money aside. Talk to your financial advisor or Human Resources representative for more information. Also, you can check to see if your local VA facility provides financial or retirement seminars for employees. Attending a class with your supervisor's approval can be well worth the time to secure your future financial growth given the great resources already available for you to utilize.

One VA, Many Different Optometry Clinics

We are all one under the federal institution of the Department of Veterans Affairs, however when you start speaking to colleagues at other VA locations, you realize that each optometry clinic functions very differently. Your NVAO Newsletter Committee has decided to showcase various clinics across the United States to show how differently our clinics function. We chose to highlight various aspects of VA optometric practice, including presence of ophthalmology, opticians, optometric technicians, residents and student externs. By seeing the way that other clinics can function, we hope to spark ideas for improvement; seeing what works well somewhere else may provide a benefit to others. Our authors have made themselves available to answer any questions in regards to their particular clinics. We encourage members to submit their own summaries of their clinics for future editions of the newsletter.

West Palm Beach, Florida VAMC

Phillip Haiman, OD

Our VA consists of 5 ODs and 5 MDs and a separate low vision and VIST clinic. In the main clinic each provider is given a schedule at the start of each day, we have a new patient clinic (which is supposed to be for new exams or comprehensive exams but never seems to flow that way) and a follow-up clinic for quick follow-ups (this also gets mixed with new patients.) We see 15 patients a day and all seems to work out smoothly.

We have a very small student externship program. We only have 1 to 2 externs per rotation, so our teaching program is very limited. We do have 8 FT techs that work-up our patients and dilate them. Most are COT or COMT certified. We perform wet refractions (except one OD who prefers to do his dry, and then dilate), perform our examination and complete our A&P. Prescriptions are sent electronically to the optical, which is operated by non-VA staff. They take care of fitting, helping patients select a frame (they actually have very nice frames) and calling patients to dispense them.

We do fit contact lenses. We are given 2 exam slots and most of these are referred from our cornea specialist. We have several fitting sets and fit all types of corneal pathology.

Our low vision clinic has 2 FT ODs. We have the benefit of sending our more complicated refractive cases to them for an "extended refraction", for example someone with double vision (not acute onset), unable to communicate, wheelchair bound, etc...

Our MDs are OD friendly and do support our decisions. We do refer to them for a 2nd opinion and they refer back to us. Sometimes, if time allows, they will give us a curbside consult and co-sign our note. It's "comforting" having a retinologist on site for conditions where we are not 100% sure if we should monitor or refer, as well as the other disciplines. We have one cornea specialist, one glaucoma specialist (however the bulk of the glaucoma cases are handled by the ODs), a general Ophthalmologist and 2 retinologists.

Visual fields are scheduled in a special clinic and performed by a designated technician. All other ancillary testing are performed by the technicians. Most ancillary testing is performed the same day, however, if time does not allow due to the flow of the clinic AND the testing can wait – we will schedule the patient for a follow-up.

For the past 3 years we have adopted what we call a "Rapid Room" to see patients more efficiently. The way the rapid room works is that there are 2 rooms set up with an autorefractor, NCT, a visual acuity reader and an autolensometer. The tech performs these automated tests and performs a thorough history, check EOM's confrontation visual fields, pupil (via penlight or will go to an exam room if they feel the angle is narrow) and dilate the patient. Then they place the patient in one of our 2 exam lanes. This way we do not have to spend time walking patient to and from the waiting room.

Wet refractions are a source of debate. I've been doing them since I graduated in 1999 – both in private practice and here at the VA. I have not found a difference in remakes, however, I have found that you must control aberrant lighting. As far as add powers, I consider 3 main factors and rarely use a near point rod. I look at their age, give them something to read and look at their reading distance and observe their overall size. Again, I rarely have a remake from an add. So, between the methods of the rapid room and my refraction, I

have more time to spend with the patient and attending to the next without having the next patient waiting – in most cases.

Each of us practices a little differently which does pose a challenge for the techs. They have to learn what each doctor wants and also have their own way of doing things, so there are pros and cons to the whole situation. I will say, overall, the tech methodology works well and allows us to provide excellent patient care.

Minneapolis, MN VAMC

Joseph Pruitt, OD

The main eye clinic is a joint venture of the University of Minnesota and VA. A mix of University and VA employees staff the clinic. Techs work-up all the patients and feed them to 2 full-time general ophthalmologists, 2 full-time optometrists, 1 part-time optometrist, and a plethora of part-time/rotating ophthalmology specialists. All the glasses orders, adjustments and dispensing are handled by 2 full-time opticians. All of the aforementioned are located in the main eye clinic.

Due to space limitations, low vision and outpatient polytrauma/TBI eye exams are provided in satellite clinic of sorts, in a building that is adjacent to the main facility/building. This clinic does not have any techs and is staffed by 1 full-time optometrist. However, housed along with the full-time low vision/polytrauma optometrist is a low vision therapist, an orientation & mobility specialist, and a living skills therapist.

Lexington, KY VAMC

Michelle T. Chen Lynch, OD

The Lexington VA is a dual facility VA. The Optometry clinic has 5 full-time ODs and 2 technicians. At full capacity, the Optometry clinic has 5 ODs, 5 technicians and a 1 PSA, so it is currently understaffed by 4 positions. Lexington is a Polytrauma Level 2 Network site, so patients with mild to moderate TBI vision concerns are seen in the Optometry Clinic. There is also an Advanced VISOR Hoptel program that is currently seeing patients on an outpatient basis, although the future plans include inpatient rehab care for a week at a time.

The health trainee program continues to grow. In July, the residency program will increase to 4 residents. The student externship program has at least 6 students. Each of the ODs and residents have their own patient schedule. Everyone rotates seeing low vision and TBI patients, although it is primarily the residents who provide direct care, and they also do the contact lens exams. Our health technicians primarily help with visual fields and teleretinal imaging as well as some other assigned tasks rather than patient screening due to our staffing shortage. We have a contract Optical office that has their own staff of 2 opticians and 1 apprentice to take care of the patient's eyeglass needs.

Our TBI clinic is for patients who have binocular vision problems secondary to TBI, but we will also see non-TBI patients for binocular vision work-ups or complex patients with diplopia as well.

Ophthalmology is also present at the Lexington VA and they are located at the other facility so Optometry and Ophthalmology are geographically separated. There is one full time staff ophthalmologist and several other part-time ophthalmologists of various subspecialties who all teach at the University of Kentucky, which is connected to the VA. We refer patients to Ophthalmology, and they discharge the patients back to us when the patient is done with the care that Ophthalmology provides.

We have an Eye to Vista imaging software that is for software integration of the specialized instruments within the clinic such as the Humphrey visual field, OCT, GDx, Corneal topographer, fundus camera and anterior segment camera. The benefit to this is that all of the results of these ancillary tests can be merged into the software package and then viewed on one computer screen within the clinic, which can save time while teaching or making clinical decisions while reviewing data.

Due to the presence of our teaching program, we standardize the care and flow of exams as much as possible between all of the staff optometrists to keep things uniform by using an exam template and following the care coordination agreements and initiatives from the Visual Impairment Prevention mandate. We also have Journal club meetings within the clinic to talk about the importance of the standards of care and evidence based medicine. We hold regular meetings with both the VISOR and Polytrauma groups to enhance multidisciplinary care for the patients.

2012 Continuing Education

July 2012

[Tropical CE. Atlantis Paradise Island, Bahamas July 1-8](#)

[CE in Belize. July 2-6](#)

[Therapeutic Pharmaceutical Agents Certification/Board Review. Fort Lauderdale, FL July 8-18](#)

[Indiana Optometric Association Summer Seminar. Carmel, IN. July 11](#)

[2012 Colorado Vision Summit. Steamboat Springs, CO. July 12-15](#)

[FOA 2012 Annual Convention. Miami, Florida. July 12-15](#)

[Midwest Optometric Glaucoma Symposium; Chicago, Illinois. July 13 -14](#)

North Dakota Optometric Assoc. Golf & CE. Bismark, ND. July 13

National Optometric Association Annual Convention. Toronto, Canada. July 18-22

Puerto Rico 2012. San Juan, Puerto Rico. July 19-22

2012 Victoria Conference. Inn at Laurel Point, Canada. July 19 -22

Oregon Optometric Physicians Assoc. Summer CE Event. Stevenson, Washington. July 20-21

Okoboji Optometric Meeting. Okoboji, Iowa. July 20-22

Northern Rockies Optometric Conference. Jackson Hole, Wyoming. July 19-21

Foundation of Vision Therapy, Part 1. Franklin, TN. July 27 -29

26th Annual Tahoe Seminar. Incline Village, NV. July 27-July 29

National Glaucoma Symposium 2012. Cape Cod, Brewster, MA. July 28-30

OEI Annual Summer Conference. Columbus, OH. July 27-29

August 2012

Southwest Florida Optometric Association Educational Retreat. Captiva Island, FL. Aug 3-5

Wisconsin Optometric Assoc. Summer Educat. Event. Sheboygan, WI. Aug 3-4

Design & Fitting of Scleral & Other Specialty Contact Lenses. Jefferson Hall, Oregon. Aug 3-4

Key West Education Conference. Key West, Florida. August 10-11

San Diego Optometric Society 2HR CE. San Diego, CA. August 16

Nova Southeastern University Super Sunday #1. Orlando, FL. Aug 19

SCOPA Annual Meeting. Myrtle Beach, SC. Aug 23 -26

Idaho Optometric Physicians Annual Congress. Boise, ID. Aug 23-25

Ophthalmic Symposium. San Antonio, Texas. August 25

Vision Expo West. Las Vegas, NV. Sept 6-8

September 2012

[Nova Fall Conference. Fort Lauderdale, FL. Sept 8-9](#)

[North Eastern State University Primary Eye Care Update. Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Sept 8-9](#)

[Envision Conference 2012. St. Louis, MO. Sept 12-15](#)

[South Dakota Optometric Society Fall Conference. Sioux Falls, SD. Sept 13-14](#)

[CE in Italy. Florence, Italy. September 14-16](#)

[Southwest Council of Optometry. Addison, TX. Sept 14-16](#)

[Nebraska Optometric Association Fall Conference. Kearney, NE. Sept 21-23](#)

[Therapy by the Sea 2011. Atlantic City, New Jersey. Sept 21-23](#)

[New Techonology & Treatments. La Jolla, California. Sept 21-23](#)

[6th Annual Forum of Ocular Disease. Mystic Connecticut. Sept 22-23](#)

[Annual Colorado Vision Training Conference. Estes Park, CO. Sept 23 -25](#)

[AEA Optometric Cruises Venitian Interlude. Sept 23-30](#)

[GWCO Congress 2012. Portland, Oregon. Sept 27-30](#)

[Illinois Optometric Association 2012 Convention. Springfield, IL. Sept. 27-30](#)

[North Dakota Optometric Association Annual Congress. Fargo, ND. Sept 26-28](#)

October 2012

[Eastwest Eye Conference. Cleveland, Ohio. Oct 4-7](#)

[PSS Forum of Ocular Disease. Orlando, FL. Oct 6-7](#)

[Michigan Optometric Association 44th Annual Fall Seminar. Lansing, MI. Oct 10-11](#)

[Virginia Optometric Association Fall Conference. Leesburg, VA. Oct 13-14](#)

[Iowa Optometric Association Hawkeye Institute. Cedar Rapids, IA. Oct 18-19](#)

Academy 2012. Phoenix, Arizona. October 24-27

NOVEMBER 2012

CE in Austin. Austin, TX. Nov 3-4

Monterey Symposium, California Optom Assoc. Monterey, CA. Nov 8-11

Pacific University 2012 CE Charleston. Doubletree Charleston, South Carolina. Nov 9-10

FCO International Annual Conference. Nashville, Indiana. Nov 9-11

NOVA Orlando Super Sunday #2. Orlando, FL. Nov 11

NAVAO Committees

The **Executive Committee** is responsible for the management of the business of the NAAVO 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. Tokumaru, 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)
- 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.
- Amber Louprasong, 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 Gruosso, 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 NAVAO 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.

Member News

There are currently no member announcements.

Please email your announcements to our Newsletter Editor, Dr. Dawn Tomasini, at dawn.tomasini@navao.org.