

GUEST EDITORIAL

MONEY WELL SPENT

Gregory Kitchener, O.D., OEP Secretary-Treasurer

As a member of the Board of Directors of the Optometric Extension Program Foundation (OEP) one of my responsibilities is to ensure that Clinical Associates receive good value for their enrollment dollars. In this regard, our staff has worked to continually improve member services. We have invested in equipment, and staff has upgraded their skills to produce more materials in-house. This has resulted in more efficient operations and reduced costs. We have sought to enhance the skills of those who write, edit, and produce OEP's extensive publications. The Board has taken steps to raise the quality of its continuing optometric education programs by providing a speaker development initiative. There has also been a continuing and concerted effort to represent the concerns and needs of our Clinical Associates in the many national optometric forums where educational and political policies are developed. Each of these services can be viewed as having a direct benefit to Clinical Associates in various ways.

Recently I had a chance to view the Foundation's efforts from a different perspective. I represented OEP at the 8th Annual Congress of the Mexican Council of Functional Optometry (COMOF). It was an interesting and educational experience. More details about the meeting are available in the News section of this issue (See NEWS page 132). My most significant role at the meeting

came as a complete surprise. I was called upon to receive the Javal Award on behalf of the Foundation. The award honors OEP's role in guiding and supporting the development of Functional Optometry in Mexico.

Our Executive Director, Mr. Robert Williams, deserves much of the credit. He has represented OEP at this Congress for the previous seven years. During this time he has been a great resource by providing print materials and speakers to meet the needs of COMOF members. And most important, Bob has taken the time to form trusting relationships with these individuals and encourage them in their quest to provide the Mexican public with professional optometric care.

Optometry in Mexico faces many challenges. Optometry there is not yet a regulated profession, although this is scheduled to change under provisions of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Nevertheless, I was present at the annual meeting of a viable organization of Mexican professionals, firmly committed to understanding and promoting the functional, developmental, and behavioral aspects of vision care.

I am proud that OEP has had a role in helping our Mexican colleagues develop. I am honored that they continue to accept OEP as a partner in expanding their horizons. I am pleased that we have been able to be supportive while allowing them to identify their needs and to choose solutions that will work for them.

This is not the first time that OEP has been honored for providing this kind of support and encouragement. In 1987, the European Society of Optometry (SOE) presented its Honoris Causa Award for the support given by the Foundation for more than 20 years.

Sorting through all of these thoughts and emotions, I recognized the most important fact: All Clinical Associates have made these international successes possible and deserve to share in these honors. Our enrollment dollars do support some activities that have no direct, tangible and immediate return to us as Clinical Associates. But these activities have created many colleagues around the world who share our enthusiasm for the functional, developmental, and behavioral aspects of vision care. These colleagues are now returning the favor and contributing to the richness and diversity of our profession.

I'm willing to concede that the organization may, at times, fall short of some of our expectations and needs. Be assured that the Board and staff will keep working on that. But in the meantime, know that your support has had a significant positive impact on the state of domestic and international optometry. More importantly, your support has impacted the lives of countless patients here and around the world.

Thank you Clinical Associates of the Optometric Extension Program Foundation, each and every one.