

Functional Care: Connecting with Our Colleagues

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Over 25 years ago, I graduated from optometry school with a special interest in care outside of traditional optometric practice. I have had many mentors, attended many meetings, and have had numerous patient experiences that have changed how I view optometry. This is certainly true for many of you as well.

Many of us have also attended our state and regional meetings on traditional optometric care that have certainly changed over the years. They are now primarily in the area of contact lenses, practice management, and the management of ocular health. Earlier in my career, I tried to become involved by volunteering to lecture on functional care areas from vision therapy to pediatrics. Many of those attempts ended with little interest from those organizing the meetings.

Over the past five years, I have observed a significant shift occurring throughout the country. There has been more inclusion of functional optometry into the general programs than ever before in my career. I believe there are several reasons for this transformation.

The “Make Vision Therapy Visible” campaign from the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) has led to increased exposure. This public relations program began in an attempt to promote stories of the impact of vision therapy on our lives. It still continues today as we see many noteworthy publications and newscasts on the importance of vision therapy. The work of Sue Barry, including her book titled *Fixing My Gaze* has further set the stage for our work. Other notable figures include Larry Fitzgerald of the Arizona Cardinals and his message of how vision therapy affected his life and career.

I also believe that the efforts by many of us who have committed to attending our local and regional general optometry meetings has laid the foundation. Perhaps more importantly, there have been a few individuals who have volunteered their time on education committees who have pushed for more lectures in the functional area. Perhaps the best known of these is Neil Draisin and his work with Southeastern Educational Congress of Optometry (SECO). Others like Brenda Montecalvo and Mike Earley have also stepped up to the plate and have had a large impact on the inclusion of functional optometry at the Annual East/West Eye Conference. These are some of the largest general optometry meetings in the United States.

I spoke with Dr. Draisin at the American Optometric Association’s (AOA) Annual Convention several months ago. He is currently the head of the SECO education committee, and this coming year he is organizing an increased number of lectures related to functional optometry. The list of lecturers includes Lynn Hellerstein, Gary Etting, Len Press, and Graham Erickson. Over the past five years, Drs. Montecalvo and Earley have been involved with the East/West Conference in Ohio, and they have had well over 20 different speakers on a wide variety of different topics. I looked at the program this year and I recognized at least 17 lectures in the area of functional optometry. Brenda and Kellye Kneuppel also organized, with the assistance of COVD and the Vision Leads Foundation, two days of education on functional care before the annual AOA meeting in Salt Lake City for “Specialty Day.” Out of all of the groups, the functional optometric care group had the highest attendance! There were more attendees than the retina and glaucoma groups!

This year’s California Optometric Association meeting had Eric Ikeda providing lectures on acquired brain injury (ABI) and Carole Hong speaking about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism. I had the opportunity to speak this year at the annual Minnesota Optometric Association meeting on infantile esotropia, paresis and palsy of EOM, selective occlusion in ABI, and selective prism in ABI/CVA. There are many others who have provided lectures this past year. These are huge contributions in our attempt to help draw our colleagues into the functional care arena. With all of this exposure, I certainly am hearing the buzz from my colleagues. They do want more than the same old lectures.

The momentum is growing. For those of you not involved, please be sure to attend your local and regional meetings. We need to continue to have a functional presence, and if possible, volunteer for the education committees and share your expertise. Your participation can help provide our colleagues education with a functional foundation. To the many of you who have already contributed, thank you for your time and efforts; it is certainly making a difference. Because of these efforts, vision therapy is not just more visible to the general public, but also to our colleagues who practice general optometry.