

Editorial • Promoting Interprofessional Care

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One of the most significant advances for those practicing in the world of vision rehabilitation has been acceptance as part of the treatment team. In his blog post in *Primary Care Optometry News*, Dr. Curt Baxstrom highlights the benefit to patients in this type of patient care model. “We have a wonderful opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues in rehabilitative medicine and occupational and physical therapy to benefit patients who have suffered from brain injuries.”

The Neuro-Optometric Rehabilitation Association promotes the concept of interprofessional care in the treatment of patients suffering a brain injury or a neurological condition. Members do not have to be optometrists, and course instructors at the annual meeting include practitioners from several disciplines. The organization deserves kudos for moving our profession into the shallow end of a very deep pool. In this column, I want to introduce you to another organization that you may not have heard of that is trying to make the interprofessional care pool even deeper.

The National Academies of Practice (NAP) was formed in 1981:

to advise governmental bodies on our healthcare system. Distinguished practitioners and scholars are elected by their peers from multiple different health professions to join the only interprofessional group of healthcare practitioners and scholars dedicated to supporting affordable, accessible, coordinated quality healthcare for all.

NAP tries to further its mission by “fostering collaboration and advocating policies in the best interest of individuals and communities.” In my opinion, collaboration is one of the most important aspects of the organization and the main reason I got involved.

There are 14 “academies,” including optometry, occupational therapy, dentistry, athletic training, and even social work. Through an extensive committee structure, members of the various academies learn about different professions and interact with each other. I have personally had the opportunity to work on a project with members from athletic training, occupational therapy, nursing, and social work. I have learned so much about how I might interact more

with these professionals in my daily practice to benefit my students’ education and my patients’ well-being.

The Annual Forum brings together all of the academies under one roof. The meeting includes lectures, posters, and workshops, but the caveat is that the material must be interprofessional, and the presenters must be from at least three academies. For example, last year, I submitted a talk with an athletic trainer and two occupational therapists on traumatic brain injury. Topics at the last Forum included pediatrics; geriatrics; diabetes; and diversity, equity, and inclusion from many vantage points. There were so many combinations of academies represented, as you might expect.

There are two levels of membership in NAP: Distinguished Fellow and Professional Member. A Distinguished Fellow is an individual who has demonstrated significant contributions to their profession, which includes interprofessional care. Fellows can be in the areas of practitioner, scholar, or public policy. Professional Members are the up-and-comers; they are on their way to becoming Fellows and have demonstrated so in their professional actions. Each academy has a roster of Fellows, including optometry, which currently has 95 Fellows. The largest academy is nursing at 275, while others are much smaller, like athletic training and psychology. For me, becoming a Fellow was a great honor. Suddenly I found myself sitting at a table with presidents of colleges, authors of books, and other movers and shakers in optometry, academics, and private practice.

The best part of NAP is helping to further the mission of collaboration in healthcare. While working with my fellow (pun intended) optometrists and the various other professionals, we have the opportunity to improve our care and that of so many others. Optometry is undoubtedly a profession that promotes lifelong learning, which must include whatever it takes to provide our patients with the best care possible. NAP not only allows this to happen, but it is written in the goals and mission statement. Check it out for yourselves!

References

1. Baxstrom C. BLOG: The OD belongs on the team. *Primary Care Optometry News*. August 23, 2019. Available from <https://www.healio.com/news/optometry/20200408/blog-the-od-belongs-on-the-team>.