At the heart of the profession are the volunteer optometrists who give of their time, talent and treasure to support our associations so that we may all serve the eye and vision care needs of the public to the best of our abilities. On February 20-21, the California Optometric Association convened its House of Delegates to conduct the business of the association and elect its officers and board of trustees.

The partnership between the Southern California College of Optometry and the COA has always been strong. A particular source of pride for the SCCO at Marshall B. Ketchum University is the election of our very own Prof. Barry Weissman to the Office of the President of the COA.

In addition, we appreciate COA trustee Dr. Jan Cooper's service as our faculty member who spearheads initiatives to promote optometry’s primary care and interprofessional role within community health centers. Many past presidents of the COA are either current faculty or trustees with MBKU including: Dr. Joseph Mallinger, Dr. Dawn Miller, Dr. John Larcabal and Dr. Harue Marsden.

I hope that you enjoy this update about the COA House of Delegates meeting, and I encourage you to stay informed, heed the calls to action and learn more about the valuable role that organized optometry plays in securing patient access to optometric care.

Stanley Woo, O.D., M.S., M.B.A.  
Dean  
Southern California College of Optometry
COA and MBKU/SCCO
The COA was founded in 1899 and the SCCO in 1904. Since their inceptions, both organizations have served California optometry, and therefore, the public has benefitted from their optometric care for more than a century. As such, the two organizations are inexorably linked in history.

We maintain that linkage by strong interactions and support through the students that the SCCO at MBKU bring into the profession, many of whom have become the backbone of COA membership and leadership for more than 100 years.

Many of our faculty today wear three hats: that of academics at the SCCO, clinicians in the care of their patients, and that of participating in membership and leadership with the COA.

To further that participation, it might be valuable to consider the challenges facing the COA over the coming year. I will break these challenges into three main foci (pun intended), but they are all interconnected.

First, legislation. We in COA leadership believe the profession faces a need to enhance its scope which will permit us to practice to the fullest extent of our education, training and abilities—as demonstrated by our peers in other states. Additionally, we see a need to protect the ability of California optometrists to provide professional eye care. We will be legislatively active in both areas during this upcoming year. Note that the SCCO at MBKU is obligated to educate our students to the highest standard of care, regardless of which state our students may eventually practice, not only California. For example, we teach injections because in some states it is both necessary and legal to provide these services, and the NBEO tests its candidates in this professional procedure. We aspire that these procedures should be in the Optometric armamentarium in California as well.

Secondly, clinical access. What good does it do the clinical optometrist to have the legal or technical ability to provide care if he or she cannot participate in insurance companies’ lists of providers? Hence, the COA is diligently working to provide our members with the qualifications and methodology to gain access to patients across a broad array of third-party payers. Securing recognition as primary care providers in the health care system is an ongoing challenge as healthcare evolves in this country.

Thirdly, membership. Undoubtedly, these days of high student debt, as well as many family and professional demands on the time, effort and economics of people make it difficult to attract and maintain members. Nevertheless, we must, if we are to continue to do the work we do for California optometry, have members. Even more, we must have members who will step up to leadership roles. We are an organization with little depth between the average member in our local societies and the leaders of the organization. My personal decade in leadership has taught me that, in essence, the leaders and the members of the COA really are each other. Therefore, we must as an organization reach out to non-member O.D.s and ask them to join with us both in enhancing and protecting their licenses, and providing students with the value of our organization, anticipating that as the students assume their roles in life after graduation, they will commit to membership and leadership in the COA.

As Hubert Humphrey once said, “This then is the test we must set of ourselves, not to march alone but to march in such a way that others will wish to join us....”
Awards

Young O.D. of the Year – Dr. Isabell Choi, Class of 2006

Excellence in Optometric Education Award – Dr. David Sendrowski

"In the recognition, Dean Woo stated that “Dr. Sendrowski has made significant and lasting contributions to the College as a teacher and clinician. He has dedicated himself to improving the quality of our academic and clinical programs, and his engagement and support of COA is exemplary. His active participation in the COA legislative process has also enabled him to share his clinical expertise on advanced procedures in helping to improve access to quality care for patients.”

George I. Deane, Jr., O.D. Memorial Leadership Award – Kailey Marshall, Class of 2015

Legislative goals were shared by Dr. Ed Hernandez, chair of the Senate Health Committee and Dr. David Redman, chair of the COA Legislation-Regulation Committee.

Senator Hernandez opened by describing the current political landscape at the State Capitol and the potential opportunities and real challenges it posed for the COA and the optometric profession in California. Among the opportunities he described was scope expansion and challenges he foresaw includes potential threats to the independence of O.D. clinical decision making.

Affirming Senator Hernandez’s political analysis, Dr. Redman set forth this year’s legislative goals including:

- Request restoration of adult materials and elimination of the 10 percent Medi-Cal rate to the very low reimbursement rates for eye and vision care services provided by optometrists in California.

- Putting patients first and preserving the clinical independence and rights of optometrists to maintain their professional integrity as a healing arts provider as it relates to the practice of optometry in a retail setting (section 655 of the business and professions code).

- With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, continue to seek ways to integrate optometry into the health care system as primary care providers.

- Scope of practice clean up language for the more efficient and rational delivery of care through the consolidation of referral requirements, elimination of list of drugs allowed to be prescribed, use of vaccinations, ordering all diagnostic tests, and laser procedures for the treatment of glaucoma as an example of primary care services.
Dr. David Cockrell, president of the American Optometric Association, gave an engaging and informative presentation about the national landscape for optometry and health care including an emphasis on the challenge of patient access to optometric care. He highlighted accountable care organizations; telehealth opportunities and challenges, including online examinations and “kiosk care;” provider discrimination threats; universal pricing policy; and, most importantly, legislative attacks on the independent practice of optometry.

Dr. Cockrell highlighted a particularly valuable resource, REthink Eyecare, for understanding health care reform and our place in it. Spearheaded by the AOA, the essential message is that patients will benefit from getting the right care in the right place at the right time, which is often in our offices. There are a number of resources to help better understand how we can increase our role in the health care system, and I encourage you to do some investigation on the site to learn how to enhance access patient access to your care.

Dr. Cockrell presided over the swearing in of the new officers and board of trustees of the COA. Together with AOA President-Elect Dr. Steven Loomis, the AOA leaders met with COA leadership and members. Their presence at the COA HOD highlights the important role of California in the national conversation about health care.

Health Care Delivery Systems Committee – Dr. Karin Meng, Chair

Highlights from Dr. Meng’s report included a common theme about challenges for patient access to medical eye care from optometry. She relayed statistics and trends about the increases in HMO sub-contracted plans and managed care for both Medi-Cal and Medicare Advantage. Of particular concern is the lack of recognition in the Medicare Advantage Guidance document for optometry as approved providers, and the very real danger of being shut out of panels.

COA committees and SCCO faculty service

Legislation-Regulation – Harue Marsden, O.D.

Communications – Judy Tong, O.D.; completed term

Health Care Delivery Systems – Stanley Woo, O.D., M.S., M.B.A.

Students from the SCCO found the California Optometric Student Section – Alex Elson Class of Class of 2016

The COA has been the single biggest resource for me to connect with doctors and be involved in our profession while still in optometry school. My first interaction was at House of Delegates as a first-year student, and that experience resulted in me taking on the task of forming the California Optometric Student Section (COSS) with my classmate Jon Mennucci. The creation of the student section got us both involved with many doctors within the COA, gave us a good idea of how the organization worked and how important it is to the practice of optometry within and outside of the state of California. Getting involved with the COA has given me the desire to also be a part of the legislative fight for our profession, leading me to attend both the COA's Legislative Day in Sacramento and the AOA's Congressional Advocacy Conference in Washington D.C. If you have never attended, I absolutely recommend considering attending one or both so you have a good idea of what is actually happening on the front lines of our profession.
What I think many people do not understand is how big and how small the COA really is. On a small scale, the COA presents itself as the doctors in all the local societies that continuously sponsor student events on and off campus. On a larger scale, the COA is the sole organization responsible for protecting and enhancing our licensure in the state of California. As a student, becoming involved with the COSS and attending different COA meetings has resulted in meeting and forming bonds with many doctors that I would have never interacted with otherwise. These bonds are completely different than exchanging business cards at a networking event, because many of these events (like the COA Legislative Day) have students paired with a set of doctors all day, working alongside them. It generates a sense of camaraderie and you very quickly begin to appreciate all that the COA has to offer, to both students and doctors.

With the creation of the COSS, students now have a greater opportunity than ever before to be involved with the COA. It has been an amazing experience and opened my eyes to how much the doctors in our local societies want us to succeed. This was clarified even more at the HOD this year when students asked the house to help generate seed money to create an operating budget for the student section. The local societies rallied to the cause pledging thousands of dollars in total donations. That being said, my message to students is to get out there, get involved and allow yourself to be surprised by the opportunities that will present themselves. If given the opportunity, the COA will be the biggest resource for you, both in your career as a student at the SCCO at MBKU as well as after your graduate.

2014 Membership Committee report highlights – Dr. Jason Flores, Chair

- COA membership grew by a net 185 O.D.s
  - First reportable growth since prior to 2005
- Student membership grew by 419
  - The future of our association
- Student to full member conversions near 90%
  - Second consecutive year, vs. 47% in 2011
- Social media audience up 1,000% vs. 2011 debut
  - Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, COA Vision Blog, LinkedIn

Local optometric societies partner with the Southern California College of Optometry

The Orange County Optometric Society led by alum Isabel Choi, ’06, won an armful of awards and recognition at this year’s COA HOD. The OCOS won awards for Website of the Year and Society Bulletin of the Year. As a special point of pride, Dr. Choi was also recognized as a Young O.D. of the Year. Congratulations OCOS!

The OCOS conducts a number of meetings and service projects, and count many SCCO faculty volunteers on the board of directors, including Dr. Edeline Lu, Dr. Justin Kwan, and Dr. Harue Marsden. Many of the delegates to the HOD are also faculty members, including Drs. Schornack and Woo, and Dr. Lin as a delegate for the COA Low Vision Rehabilitation Section.

Students are welcome at the OCOS and often serve as volunteers at the local society meeting with an opportunity to get to know member doctors, learn more about the state of the profession, and attend informative CE.

Also important, we have and will continue to send representatives to the COA Legislative Day in Sacramento to advocate for the profession and our patients, and continue to support Dr. Ed Hernandez in our fight for scope expansion and patient access to our care.

Dr. Edeline Lu, O.D.
http://www.ocos.org/
The Los Angeles County Optometric Society (LACOS) stays connected to the SCCO in several ways. First, two students from the school are allowed to attend every LACOS board meeting, ask questions, discuss issues at the school and chat with doctors before and after the meeting. Due to these students’ requests, the LACOS has donated to the SCCO at MBKU for a variety of reasons, including spring and fall scholarships, VOSH trips and student-doctor mixers, which LACOS doctors also attend.

In addition, LACOS doctors have given various presentations to SCCO at MBKU students, most recently at the Western Regional Conference on why students should join organized optometry. The LACOS has also allowed students to attend LACOS CE seminars for the same minimal price as LACOS members so that the students can stay up-to-date on the newest advances in optometry.

Furthermore, the LACOS has been very active with students at the SCCO at MBKU by coordinating vision screenings at health fairs at which LACOS doctors and SCCO at MBKU students volunteer. These include the annual Feria de Salud and multiple other health fairs sponsored by local legislators, which allow doctors and students to both assist those in need and to stay connected to the political leaders of California.

Dr. Jonovan Ottenbacher, past president of the LACOS
http://www.lacos.net/

Philanthropic leadership and support provided by Vision West, Inc. to the COA

- Long-term sponsorship contract of $155,000
- Event sponsorships / booth - $11,000
- Student membership promotion - $1,250
- Member recruitment promotion - $2,439

Total 2014 direct COA support - $169,689

Special thanks to Dr. Joseph Mallinger, president of Vision West, for his foresight, vision and leadership.

California Vision Foundation President John Larcabal and MBKU Trustee Dawn Miller.

Leaders and fundraisers extraordinaire, Drs. Larcabal and Miller promote the good work of the California Vision Foundation.