

THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN OPTOMETRY



Our profession continues to grow, and various forces, both internal and external, help shape its path. For many new ODs, it's hard to imagine that there was a time when the use of mydriatics was not in our scope of practice. Fortunately, legislative efforts have accelerated scope expansion to allow the

use of many topical and oral medications and, depending on the state, injections and laser surgical procedures. The future is bright, but it requires forward-thinking open-mindedness and a commitment to evolve and change.

Opportunity lies in the numbers. An estimated 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 years of age every day, and by 2030 all baby boomers will be at least 65 years old.¹ With older age comes increased risk for ocular diseases that optometry is perfectly suited to diagnose, treat, and manage. However, despite the demand for medical eye care, only a small percentage of optometrists are seizing the opportunity to lead the way and focus their practices more intently on the medical eye care needs of their patients. If we don't continue to evolve and expand our scope and practice to the full extent of our licensure, other professions and technologies will take the place of the medical optometrist. Health care systems are broadening the use of physician assistants to perform dilated diabetic eye evaluations and operate imaging systems, and artificial intelligence technologies are popping up in primary care offices across the country to do the same.

Optometry remains an essential function, but the profession needs to reinvent itself once again. We need to embrace new technology and increase our focus on medical services to realize the opportunities our changing profession affords us. Glasses and contact lenses will remain a part of the revenue stream for most ODs; however, online sales increased significantly throughout 2020, and the increase will continue along with pandemic-related restrictions. Consumers are ever more comfortable shopping online from the convenience of their homes. Online eye exams are another threat to our profession.

The articles in this issue will help get you through these challenging times and changing conditions by identifying threats to our profession, as well as opportunities for growth. In "Effective Leadership Through Turbulent Times," Ahmad Fahmy, OD, FAAO, Dipl(ABO), explains how a bold leadership style that marries the complexity of human nature with imagination is essential for success in turbulent times. Brianna Rhue, OD, FAAO, writes about turning challenges into successes ("The Disruptees Can Become the Disruptors"). And we learn more about the future of telemedicine from Joshua Davidson, OD, FSL, FAAO ("Telemedicine: Here to Stay?"), and Lori Latowski Grover, OD, PhD, ("Telemedicine in Eye and Contact Lens Care"). Eric Harris, OD, FAAO, opens our eyes to the reality of microaggressions that our Black colleagues experience in "Casting a Light on Race and Racism in Optometry." And Chris A. Johnson, PhD, DSC, discusses new technology that's revolutionizing how we perform visual fields in "A New Era in Visual Field Testing."

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1. 2020 census will help policymakers prepare for the incoming wave of aging boomers. United States Census Bureau. December 10, 2019. www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/12/by-2030-all-baby-boomers-will-be-age-65-or-older.html. Accessed February 23, 2021.

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