

ODS OF INDUSTRY



WESLIE HAMADA, OD, FAAO

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND.

I grew up in the small town of Grants Pass in southern Oregon and I did my undergrad in Southern California. I attended Southern California College of Optometry and afterwards went

to practice in Hawaii. I became involved with the Hawaii Optometric Association and the American Optometric Association and started contact lens research, which allowed me to engage with many in industry.

HOW DID YOU DEVELOP AN INTEREST IN OPTOMETRY?

I originally did not want to be an optometrist. My dad was a successful optometrist, and I wanted to find my own path. After trying an optometry rotation in college and learning about all the different ways my dad was involved in the profession, I realized that optometry was a pretty amazing profession. Along with patient care, he was lecturing, attending work groups with his colleagues, and working with various companies in the industry. He was heavily involved in advocacy at state and national levels to ensure the profession continued to push forward. After speaking with him, I realized optometry was much more than patient care.

HOW DID YOU COME TO BE IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

I was a clinical investigator for multiple contact lens companies in practice. I shared my interest in working in industry with my local sales representative. He connected me with members of the company, and a year later, I took the opportunity to work in research and development at Johnson & Johnson Vision Care. From there, I moved to other companies and took on diverse roles, often out of my comfort zone.

Currently, I am the director of professional marketing at Iveric Bio. After doing my due diligence (ie, understanding the company and its pipeline), I accepted the opportunity and, hopefully, will be helping launch a new product for the treatment of geographic atrophy (GA) later this summer.

WHAT DOES YOUR TYPICAL WORKDAY LOOK LIKE? WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES?

A typical day is never typical. My main responsibility is developing education, tools, and resources on GA and its treatments for optometrists and comprehensive ophthalmologists, and emphasizing the important role they play in their patients' care.

One thing I enjoy about being in a smaller company is getting to wear multiple hats. But every single role or hat I wear falls under the same mission—to do right by patients and by my colleagues.

WHAT ARE THE MOST REWARDING OR ENJOYABLE ASPECTS OF YOUR JOB?

I have always been a life-long student, so the most enjoyable aspect for me is continuously expanding my knowledge. I'm learning about a disease that, until the last several years, wasn't talked about, which brings me back to my clinical acumen. I'm mastering a job function that I've never had and discovering true marketing roles, leveraging insights, and working with different teams to develop a product or a campaign holistically.

I get to work with my optometry colleagues in practice around the country. We have so many amazing optometrists who are subject matter experts, and I get to leverage their expertise and bring their voices into the company.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED THROUGH YOUR INDUSTRY ROLE THAT YOU NEVER WOULD HAVE LEARNED WORKING IN A PRACTICE SETTING?

The value of collaboration and asking for help. In a practice setting, I often felt as if I had to figure everything out myself as the business owner and the expert for my patients. What I've realized in 10 years in the industry is I can ask for help. If I don't know something, I have a huge network of team members and someone will have the answer. In a company, there is a sense of belonging to a team, and I never feel isolated.

This also took realizing that my voice was only one voice, and I needed to open my eyes and understand other voices. I need to listen, understand, learn, and collaborate.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE INTERESTED IN PURSUING A CAREER IN THE OPTOMETRIC INDUSTRY?

Above all, be good at what you do. This doesn't mean you need to practice for a long time, but instead, develop your craft. A lot of the time, industry is looking at what value you bring. They can teach you marketing and sales, but not every marketer or sales representative can be an optometrist.

Building your network is key. All of my industry roles have been due to connections. I was building my network back when I was practicing in Hawaii and didn't even realize it. If you are just starting or have been at it for some time, keep building that network. You never know when it may come in handy. ■

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