



Up Close

with **JENNIFER COYLE, OD, MS, FAAO**

You were the first female president of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry and you served two terms. Describe your experience in this role.

It was such a rewarding experience because I established a president's priority and launched a task force on interprofessional education, or IPE. That task force planned and hosted a summit on IPE in 2016 at Marshall B. Ketchum University, bringing together educators from many health professions who were passionate about promoting better patient outcomes through collaborative care. We shared best practices and developed strategies to bring back to our institutions. I also had the privilege of representing the schools and colleges within other organizations and working with the American Optometric Association, the American Academy of Optometry, the National Board of Examiners in Optometry, and the Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry. I developed a broad working knowledge about the challenges we face in the profession and a sincere respect for the volunteers who work to make optometry better each day.

What draws you toward academia and education, and what drives your desire to stay involved with optometric organizations?

I love academia because every day brings a new challenge and the opportunity to learn. I work with gifted people, educators, researchers, clinicians, and other professionals who constantly teach me new things. I also believe volunteering pays it forward to the next generation. My son just graduated from optometry school and is doing a

residency in Miami, so I like to believe that I'm helping to create and nurture the future of his profession.

What advice do you have for women in the profession looking to get involved in an organization on a higher level?

Reach out and find a mentor—someone who shares a truth that resonates with you or who has followed a path you're interested in. I've had several mentors throughout my career who not only opened doors for me, but also often saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. Join as many organizations as you can; each offers something different and needs membership engagement. Set goals and write them down.

How did your interest in cornea and contact lenses blossom?

I started wearing eyeglasses in the fourth grade, and I hated them. The summer after my freshman year of high school, I got a job at the local Dairy Queen. With my first paycheck in hand, I went to my local optometrist and asked if he would fit me with contact lenses and put me on a payment plan, because it would probably take me all summer to pay them off. He ended up giving me a job in his office. The day I got that first pair of contact lenses, I had the quintessential moment of looking outside and thinking someone had painted the leaves on the trees. I was hooked! To me, it's still astounding that a little piece of plastic can have such a life-changing effect. Plus, I always loved the challenge of specialty lens fitting; small changes in base curve or optic zone can completely alter how successful that little piece of plastic is in the eye.

What do you find most rewarding about being an educator?

I love seeing alumni find their bliss. When I get that phone call, it often goes like this: "Hi Dr. Coyle, you probably don't remember me, but I was in the class of (year). I'm looking for an associate now." Usually I do remember them well, and I'm proud of where optometry has taken them.

What is the most important thing young ODs need to know about the future of the profession?

Use technology to improve your patients' lives. Don't fear it; use it to make yourself a better doctor. In the era of OCT and artificial intelligence, we can focus on helping patients understand their options and treatment plans and spend less time gathering data. Our empathy, compassion, and intercultural communication skills are critical to help patients understand the data. Be good listeners, stay current with treatment and management options, and don't hesitate to refer to other optometrists when something is beyond what you want to engage in.

And let's do something to address the worldwide myopia problem. Every time we see myopic kids, we should be talking to them and their parents about myopia control. The statistics and projections are staggering. As primary vision care providers, prevention is our duty. ■

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