



GETTING INVOLVED IN GOVERNMENT



One voice can make a world of difference.

BY RACHAEL WRUBLE, OD, FAAO

Have you ever attended your local district optometry meeting? Do you remember those meetings that held elections for the local board positions? If so, did you secretly slump down in your seat and avoid eye contact to make sure you were not volunteered?

That was me (and about 120 other people) at a Piedmont (Charlotte, North Carolina) District meeting back in 2010. You could hear a pin drop in that room, and my guilty mind thought, “How hard can it be?” So I raised my hand and was unanimously elected as secretary-treasurer. And that’s where it all began.

FAST FORWARD TO THE PRESENT

I am now the president-elect of the North Carolina Optometric Society

(NCOS) and on track to be the third woman and youngest president in the history of the NCOS. Since 2010, I have served on numerous committees

and held a position every year on either the local or state board.

I initially got involved as a way to help my local society, but it has evolved into so much more. The profession is constantly changing—from completing refractions, to prescribing medications, to using lasers and injections. In order to practice at the level that we’re taught in school, we must fight to get there.

As a young optometrist, I was naïve in thinking that because I was taught a procedure in school, it should be easy to tell our state legislators that we should be able to perform it. Unfortunately, this task is quite difficult, and it’s not something one or even five people can do on their own.

My “why” was to be another member helping our state succeed so we

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Getting involved with your local state board provides an opportunity to network and learn while also helping to advance the field of optometry.
- ▶ You don’t have to be a board or committee member to make your voice heard; reach out to your local and state legislators.
- ▶ By working together, optometrists can find solutions and new opportunities that will help us better serve our patients.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO GET INVOLVED

Four reasons why every optometrist should think about getting involved:

- 1 Your opinion matters.** Major changes throughout history occurred because someone spoke up and stood up for something. Step up and have your voice be heard.
- 2 Differing viewpoints keep things interesting.** The same old thing can be boring. Every new perspective on a problem or idea for a possible opportunity gives our profession more potential for growth to better serve our patients.
- 3 Great networking opportunities.** Getting involved is a terrific way to meet people who share your goals. Listening to the experiences of others can be refreshing and get you reenergized.
- 4 Warm, fuzzy feelings.** It feels good to be involved and know that you're trying to make a difference in your community.

could reach the next level in providing care to patients. The easy route would be for me to sit back and hope it gets done by other go-getters, but what if everyone else is sitting back and thinking the same thing? We can't just wait for change to happen; we have to work together!

Throughout the year, I travel to meetings to learn what other states are doing and how to work with legislators to advance our profession. In the early years, I mainly focused on learning North Carolina optometry, but the more I learn about what the profession is doing in other states, the more excited I get to bring back

information to my home state. For example, at the AOA Third Party National Conference, I met the Georgia third-party chair. He talked about how he works to create relationships between insurance companies and optometrists to help bridge the gap. Our board in North Carolina has hired a state insurance liaison, and now members can stay better educated about the ever-changing insurance world.

I'm often asked if I enjoy being so involved. I'm an extrovert, so I love meeting new people and networking. With each new relationship, I gain energy and get even more ideas. I am

also a practice owner, so when I meet other doctors, not only do we discuss topics related to legislation, but we also discuss ways to improve our individual offices.

LOOKING AHEAD

As I mentioned, next year I'll be taking on the presidency of the NCOS. During my term, I plan to visit all the local districts in North Carolina and several of the optometry schools and to attend all of the regional and national meetings. I look forward to continuing our growth in enhancing eye care for every person throughout the state.

I've had people tell me that I'm missing my kids' childhoods, but I look at my involvement as a way to show my kids the importance of being passionate and involved in something that I believe in. Sure, I've missed a few moments in my kids' lives, but thanks to FaceTime and the ability to livestream events, no matter where optometry takes me, I'm always able to say goodnight to my family and stay in the loop.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

I strongly encourage you, my optometric colleagues, to step out of your comfort zone, to reach out to your local or state organization, and to ask how you can help. Find out what you're interested in and make your voice heard. You don't have to be president of your state board, but being involved even on the smallest level can make a significant difference. For other reasons to work toward professional growth and development on a large scale, see *Why It's Important to Get Involved*. ■

RACHAEL WRUBLE, OD, FFAO

- Belmont Eye, Belmont, North Carolina
- wrubleod@gmail.com
- Financial disclosure: None