

# GUEST EDITORIAL

## PATRIOTISM & RESPONSIBILITY

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I read with interest the editorials in the last issue of the *Journal of Behavioral Optometry*. Drs. Suchoff and Mozlin captured the thoughts of life-long New Yorkers who reflect on the tragic events of September 11, 2001. They discussed the resolve of New Yorkers following this event and the manner in which attitudes instantly changed. In the hustle and bustle of “the city,” such things as people actually looking at each other, helping one another and pulling together in NYC had not been commonplace. In that one day, everything changed. If residents from all NYC boroughs can so unify, it should be also be possible for anyone or any group to pull together in the same manner.

Patriotism is a concept that has been talked about since September 11. It is demonstrated by the enormous number of flags that are flying on homes, mailboxes, automobiles, and just about everywhere. Patriotism, however, is much more than waving a flag or pledging allegiance, although these are certainly not inconsequential. But let’s not get so caught up in the flag waving that we lose sight of the true meaning of patriotism. Patriotism involves doing what is necessary as a part of the team to make the team better. It often entails personal sacrifice to make continued existence better for the group.

Last week on ESPN radio, I heard an interview with Mike Krzyzewski, head basketball coach at Duke University. One of the issues he discussed was “collective responsibility.” I propose that until 9/11, as a nation, we de-emphasized this important concept: over the past few decades there has been an American societal movement toward self-improvement. In optometry the focus has been to maximize us as practitioners, which would hopefully lead to increased effectiveness of the profession as a mainstream health care provider. This has led to significantly altered practice patterns, practice promotions, and the definition of professionalism. In the meantime, optometry, the profession, has also made significant strides in growth and development, expanded scope of practice and a change in the manner in which we practice.

However, an unexpected result has been a fragmentation of the profession. There has been much positioning of the various special areas of practice to the point where it sometimes seems we are on opposite sides. As has happened with the nation, I believe it is time for all of optometry to demonstrate a “collective responsibility.” Rather than focus on our individual practice, our special interest area of optometry or our profession, let’s focus on how we all can optimally work

together to provide the best care for the patients we serve.

There are many places we can serve but let’s start by becoming a “part of.” I am amazed at the number of colleagues who are not members of the American Optometric Association (AOA). The AOA is the place where the collective voice of the profession can be heard. Become a member and participate in your local society and state organization. Become an active member of the organizations that represent your area(s) of special interest and expertise not only to improve yourself, but also to strive to fit these areas into the collective responsibility of optometry as a national health care profession.

When you become a part of these organizations, you will realize the dedication, involvement, and diversity of the many people who make up the profession of optometry. The most important part is not to wait until there are issues of interest to you but to begin to work on issues of and for the profession. Earn the trust of the group. Be a team player and the team will look to you when there are issues related to your specific interests.

The Optometric Extension Program Foundation is committed to working together with all groups within and outside the profession to provide the highest level of health care for the patients we serve.