

EDITORIAL

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

It is rare to attend a major optometric conference devoted to continuing professional education, where one does not hear disparaging remarks about the program and/or the speakers. And there are often newspaper readers, crossword puzzle doers and those who nap during lengthy presentations. I have usually attributed these activities to the concept that no matter what the meeting planners do, they cannot please everyone.

I could discern none of the above activities at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) held in Phoenix, Arizona in October of this year. This was particularly noteworthy because I'm told that the number of attendees was the greatest in the history of this meeting. Greater numbers can mean greater diversity of interests and expectations, which can lead to disappointments.

There were four Applied Concepts in Vision Therapy courses. These were given two days prior to meeting itself. Each course was conducted for some 16 hours over this time and was limited to 40 registrants. Each course was sold out in advance. I did not speak with all the 160 registrants, but did with a fair number. All of those felt the material was clinically important and professionally presented; that it was well worth the extra time and money to attend.

The topics and speakers for the main part of the meeting were exceptional.

The topics were extremely timely and were presented in a manner that held the audience's interest and attention. Adequate time was provided for questions and answers, both of which were by and large intelligent and informative to the audience. The room itself met the highest standards for the audio-visual components of the presentations.

I was not able to attend the symposium on Reading Related to Light and Color. However, attendees have told me that each speaker was excellent and was able to effectively present a different viewpoint in a logical and scientific manner. Apparently bridges were built across what has been a chasm of contradictory opinions.

The exhibitors' hall was impressive in terms of the displays and the vision therapy related materials that are available. My impression is that sales were quite brisk, as evidenced by the interest of the attendees, the significant activities in the hall and the smiles on the exhibitors' faces.

While I am not able to comment on all components of the educational program, from every aspect on which meetings are judged, this was an extremely successful meeting. This is not only my opinion, but is based on conversations I had with others at the meeting and a number of subsequent e-mails posted on the VTOD List Serve based at Indiana University. In this regard recognition should be given to COVD's Annual

Planning Committee and particularly to committee members Drs. Stephen Miller and Gary Williams. Dr. Miller, who is Executive Director of the organization, is responsible for all meeting logistics. In his quiet and unassuming way he ensured that all components, from registration to hotel accommodations and beyond, were carried out in an efficient and seamless manner. Dr. Williams' role is coordinator for the educational portions of these meetings. He saw that the speakers' needs were met and ensured that time lines were honored. Dr. Williams was a continuing presence but never interjected himself in an obtrusive manner during the meeting. He and Dr. Miller were resources for both speakers and audience.

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Another factor that contributed to the success of this meeting was at least equally important. It was the attendees. The term “electricity” was used by a number of people to describe the ambience that prevailed. The audiences were firmly attentive to the speakers; people were leaning forward in their seats to be closer to the presenters, and sat back only to take notes. I perceived that people were there not solely for the continuing education credits, but more for the education itself. While the sense of family that has always been a hallmark of COVD’s annual meetings prevailed, it had a different aura; people attended not only for the social aspect, but to seriously conduct the family business of learning about and legitimizing the various components of functional optometry. This was particularly impressive to a number of optometric students with whom I spoke.

The officers and staff of COVD should be recognized for conducting a meeting that exceeded most expectations.