

EDITORIAL

THE NEW ROLE OF OPTOMETRIC CLINICAL FACULTY

The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) sponsored its second Summer Institute for Faculty Development from July 22nd to July 25th of this year in St. Louis. The deans and presidents of the profession's educational institutions had been asked to nominate attendees. At least one faculty member from each of the nation's schools and colleges of optometry attended. The coordinators of the Institute were Dr. David Health, President of the State University of New York and Dr. Janice Sharre, Academic Dean at the Illinois College of Optometry. Facilitators included: Dr. Elizabeth Hoppe, founding Dean at the Western University College of Optometry, Charles Haine, Academic Dean at the Southern College of Optometry (SCO), SCO faculty member Dr. David Damari, and Dr. Linda Casser, Director of Clinical Examinations at the National Board of Examiners in Optometry. The Institute was funded by ASCO and several corporate sponsors. I was privileged to be one of several presenters on topics that were pertinent to the mission of the Institute.

Thirty-two faculty members from the nation's optometric schools and colleges were in attendance. The group's average faculty tenure was about five years, with relatively few at the extreme ends of the bell curve. All held optometric professional degrees, and there were several who had advanced academic degrees. More than half had completed a fellowship or residency program. All were engaged in active clinical teaching and/or in classroom teaching in clinically related topics. It was apparent to me that these individuals viewed their faculty positions as careers, not just jobs.

The meeting was unique in that for the better part of four days a diverse group of optometric clinical faculty members interacted in the hall, during presentations, at breakout groups and meal times. As a listener, it became evident to me that the role of academic clinical faculty has undergone a gradual, but significant change. The health care reimbursement system has increasingly resulted in a focus on clinical productivity; namely, the "bottom line". Thus, I found that the vast majority of these optometrists devoted about 80% of their time to some combination of clinically related didactic teaching, "in clinic" teaching, and direct patient care. Add to this the usual committee assignments, and it is clear that the previously more generous allotment of time given for faculty development is now much less. The conundrum is that for advancement of academic rank and tenure, there is the universal requirement of scholarly activity achievement. This includes involvement in funded research and being published in peer reviewed journals. The Institute's planners recognized this problem in advance, and psychologist Dr. Pamela A. Cogdal's topic was *Time Management for Early Career Faculty*. The thrust of her presentation was how to balance family and other responsibilities with career demands. Audience interactions at Dr. Cogdal's presentation and in breakout groups showed that the previous position of the academic clinician residing in an ivy tower no longer exists. Indeed, if one is to successfully pursue and advance in an optometric clinical teaching career, more than a forty-hour work week is required.

I came away from the meeting convinced that these young optometrists are compe-

tent and experienced clinicians with excellent credentials. They do not fit the old saying, "Those who can't, teach". By and large, they would be an asset to any type of practice setting. Yet, for whatever reasons, they have chosen an academic career, where the financial rewards are less than that in other professional venues. The recent announcements of new colleges of optometry being formed in California and Texas will make these individuals with teaching experience very desirable commodities. The challenge for the existing schools and colleges will not only be to keep these individuals in academia, but to plan for further recruitment and development of others of equal competence and dedication. The commitment of ASCO to conduct and continue these Summer Institutes for Faculty Development is a significant step in this direction.



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