Improving Vision Health Equity through Workforce Diversity

Session Moderator:
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Prevent Blindness Board Member

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Wayne State University

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University of California Berkeley School of Optometry
Developing a Diverse Ophthalmic Workforce

M. Roy Wilson, M.D., M.S.
President, Wayne State University
What is meant by “diverse”

- URM—Black, Hispanic, American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander

- Women and URMs
Magnitude of the problem

Residents: 2005-2015

• Female residents: proportion increased from 35.6% to 44.3%
• URM: proportion decreased from 8.7% to 7.7%
• 2020: slight increase in URM residents from 7.7% in 2015 to 9.0% in 2020
  • Increase almost exclusively in Hispanics, 5.1% to 6.1%
  • Blacks went down from 2.4% to 2.3%
Ophthalmology department faculty less diverse than other medical faculty as a group

- Academic path to ophthalmology
- Women and URMs
- Orthopedic surgery less diverse
- Radiology about the same
What can be done?

Exposure
• K-12 to medicine and science
• Medical students to ophthalmology

National Medical Association, founded 1895 [https://www.nmanet.org/](https://www.nmanet.org/)


AAO/AUPO Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring Program [https://www.aao.org/minority-mentoring](https://www.aao.org/minority-mentoring)
Building a Diverse Optometric Workforce

Ruth Y. Shoge, OD, MPH, FAAO
University of California Berkeley
School of Optometry
In the beginning...

Photo credit: Salus University
Who Runs the World...Girls!

- 1899 Gertrude Stanton\(^1\) became first licensed optometrist
- 1969: 3% enrolled students
- 1979: 19%
- 1989: 44%
- **And now**...70% of student body!
- 50% of practicing ODs

Photo credit: SUNY College of Optometry
Demographic Trends in OD Students, 2006

- White: 63.2%
- Asian: 23.3%
- Hispanic or Latino: 5.1%
- Other: 4.9%
- Black or African American: 3.5%

Resource: Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Demographic Trends in OD Students, 2020

- White: 49.2%
- Asian: 30.1%
- Hispanic or Latino: 7.2%
- Black or African: 3.2%
- Other: 10.4%

Resource: Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Current Optometric Workforce

• 48,196 practicing ODs (42,680 FTE)$^2$
  • Net annual growth approximately 1.4%
  • Workforce will likely grow 0.6 – 0.7% faster on average than the US population

• Racial/Ethnic Demographics$^3$
  • 2.5% Black/African American
  • 4.7% Hispanic/Latino
  • 16.2% Asian (East, Southeast, and South)
  • 72% White/Caucasian
Efforts to Improve Workforce Diversity

• Remove barriers
• Increase scholarships
• Mentorship
• Cross-organizational collaboration
  • Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
  • National Optometric Association
  • American Academy of Optometry
  • Black Eye Care Perspective

Photo credit: Ruth Shoge
# Race/Ethnicity – Past Five OptomCAS Cycles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Cycle</th>
<th>Black/African-American Applicants</th>
<th>Hispanic/Latino Applicants</th>
<th>Total Verified Applicants at End-of-Cycle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>261</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019-2020</td>
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<td>5%</td>
<td>284</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>5.96%</td>
<td>339</td>
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<td>Ethnicities and Races</td>
<td>Number of Applicants</td>
<td>% of Applicants to OptomCAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>12.63%</td>
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<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Did Not Report</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2684</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
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</table>
Why It’s Important

• Reduce disparities in eye care
• Improve health outcomes
• Patient-physician concordance
• Cultural competency and humility training
Accountability

• Holding ourselves and each other responsible
  • Acknowledge the progress we’ve made
  • Commit to do more
  • Be transparent about mistakes and obstacles

• Is our profession a reflection of the communities we serve?

• Beyond diversity → Inclusion, Equity, and Belonging
Resources

1. Denial A. A look back: Celebrating women in Optometry. Optometric Education, 2019; 44(20)

