

# President's Statement

ROBERT E. WIGGINS JR., MD, MHA

## For Whom the Bell Tolls

*No man is an Iland, entire of it selfe; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee. –John Donne (1624)*

In 2015, I had the opportunity to join other ophthalmologists on a trip to exchange ideas with colleagues in Cuba. Just prior to returning home, we visited a former home of author Ernest Hemingway. Partially written in Cuba, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is one of Hemingway's greatest novels, and the trip to his home inspired me to read the book. Set during the Spanish Civil War in 1937, the story is one of an American college instructor who leaves his job and travels to Spain to fight against the fascists threatening to take over the country. His risky—and ultimately fatal—mission is to blow up a strategic bridge held by the enemy. The title of the book was derived from a poem written by John Donne (1572–1631), an English poet and dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Donne argues that the tolling of church bells, which signified the death of another human life, is a toll for each of us, as we are all bound together. In Hemingway's book, the hero's response to the call to action arises from his understanding that we are all connected and that injustice on the other side of the Atlantic required his involvement—the bell tolled for him.

Like the protagonist of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, we are all connected and can accomplish much more by working together than we can alone. The Academy provides the vehicle to connect our community and achieve results for our patients that none of us could manage by ourselves. Last year, more than 1,000 members volunteered their time to the Academy in the service of our profession and our patients. The Academy offers many opportunities for participation that further our mission of enhancing our patients' lives by delivering the highest quality eye care. These include over 100 committees ranging from advocacy/governmental affairs, the annual meeting, and clinical education, to practice management and global ophthalmology, among others.

Beyond committee work, there are many more opportunities to volunteer. What are your skills? Do you like to write? If so, you may be interested in writing articles for *EyeNet*, *EyeWiki*, *Scope*, *YO Info*, patient articles, or *Practice Management Express*. Volunteers also review journal manuscripts, *Ophthalmic Technology Assessments*, and *Preferred Practice Patterns*. Opportunities also are available to speak on clinical and practice management topics as well as to mentor underrepresented minorities in medicine.

Our profession needs a voice in Washington and in each of our states to protect access to high quality eye care for patients. The bottom line: Our success depends on Academy members to actively participate as legislative advocates, to support legislators via fundraisers, and to participate in Congressional Advocacy Day. When access to quality care for our patients is threatened, don't ask which subspecialist or state is affected: The bell tolls for all of us.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and survivor of a World War II concentration camp, asserts that the need for meaning is a core motivating force in all our lives. Get engaged with your Academy. You will find meaning here, and you'll also make new friends and have fun. No ophthalmologist is an island. We can accomplish great things when we are connected and act together in the interest of our patients. I hope you hear the bell tolling. It tolls for thee.

Put your toe in the water with a short-term volunteer opportunity and learn about different parts of the Academy through a wide variety of available assignments ([aao.org/membership/volunteer](http://aao.org/membership/volunteer)). Or, let us know of your interest in an Academy committee. Committees offer a longer-term commitment—and there is competition for open positions ([aao.org/membership/volunteer/committees](http://aao.org/membership/volunteer/committees)).



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Academy 2022 President