

President's Statement

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Gratitude Begets Altruism

I am deeply honored and grateful to serve as president of the Academy. I look forward to working alongside our members, Academy leaders, and staff so that we may continue to serve our patients and our communities, educate the next generations of ophthalmologists, and remain the medical specialty with the highest level of personal and professional satisfaction.

However, appreciation, gratitude, and optimism for the future may be tempered by current worldwide turmoil in addition to the many challenges our specialty faces: declining reimbursements, regulatory burdens, shortage of qualified staff, and rising fixed costs, to name a few.

Nevertheless, I would like to reflect with you, my fellow ophthalmologists, on the good we accomplish every day, for our patients, our communities, and our profession.

I am grateful to be an ophthalmologist. Ophthalmology remains one of the most desirable specialties in all of medicine, attracting the best and brightest medical students. No other specialty cares for patients of all ages, providing routine and complex clinical and surgical care to patients throughout their life journey, protecting and improving sight—universally felt to be the most precious special sense.

I am grateful, too, for the Academy. It plays an impactful role throughout the entire course of our careers, delivering value to every aspect of what we as ophthalmologists do: providing continuing education; supporting our practice and staff needs; advocating for our profession at a federal and state level; and being an integral part of our professional lives during residency training, throughout our practice years, and even as we transition into retirement. In addition, the annual meeting serves as a venue not only to learn, but also to make and sustain lifelong friendships.

The Academy is an effective and valued professional organization, which is in great part due to the exemplary level of member engagement and participation through service on committees, task forces, and editorial boards; the creation of educational materials that are accessed globally; the development of practice management tools; and passionate engagement in advocacy efforts. It is obvious that “giving back” is part of our core values—it is who we are.

I am especially grateful to have practiced pediatric oph-

thalmology and then pediatric neuro-ophthalmology for a total of 34 years. Our pediatric patients—50% of whom are uninsured or on Medicaid—come from diverse backgrounds. Witnessing the struggles these families face has motivated me to take on the challenge of finding ways to better serve the safety net population.

Gratitude leads to altruism. As we embark on a new year, how can we manifest our gratitude and give back to our patients and communities, and ultimately our profession?

I suggest giving strong consideration to providing care for the uninsured or those who are on Medicaid. Nationally, 25.3 million U.S. citizens are uninsured, and roughly 4.2% of children are uninsured.

People who are unable to obtain, maintain, or gain access to affordable health care and eye care experience higher rates of vision impairment from uncorrected refractive errors and cataracts and permanent vision impairment from age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma. We should join together to advocate for changes to our system that improve access for all, but, at the same time, we must consider the patients who are in need today.

Here are just a few ways we can manifest altruism:

- Add or increase the volume of patients in your practice who are uninsured or who are on Medicaid.
- Attend or initiate an ophthalmology service at a regional Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)/Community Health Center (CHC).
- Provide free care at a free clinic.
- Help to cover your local ER.
- Become an EyeCare America volunteer.

Lastly, thank you for the opportunity and honor to serve you as the president of the Academy in 2024. I am grateful.



Jane
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Academy 2024
President