

In 2020 our virtual Annual Meeting was remarkable

Last year we could not have imagined the challenges the world would face in 2020. All plans made for such an iconic year for the eye health sector were sent into turmoil with the emergence of COVID-19. This also included our annual gathering which, for the first time, was held completely online.

Under the banner “*Envisioning a new world*” on November 7th, 121 members and friends of VOSH/International from 20 countries came together in a series of sessions led by experts on thematic areas that contribute to make our commitment to affordable, accessible and high quality eye health care for all a reality.

We were delighted to welcome Jacqueline Grove, Vice President of Talent development, culture, philanthropy, diversity, equity and inclusion at National Vision Inc. NVI is a visionary sponsor and provided an unrestricted educational grant for this year’s event. We are extremely grateful for NVI’s loyal support and look forward to continuing strengthening our collaboration.

This year’s event was also marked by the recognition of two power couples who received our most important awards. The Harry Zeltzer Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Dr Matthew Blondin and Attorney Audrey Blondin of VOSH-CT and the Humanitarian of the Year Award recognised the work of VOSH-TWECS-British Columbia leaders, Dr Marina Roma-March and Derrick March. The awardees’ experiences, each spanning over 20 years, could only be described as inspirational and soul touching. The Blondins and the Marches justly represent what VOSH mission is all about.

Attendees enjoyed a truly remarkable educational programme covering starting with the value of telemedicine in eye care led by Dr Bina Patel with support of Drs Nicole Ross and Anita Gulmiri, a great team representing the New England College of Optometry who provided a comprehensive insight on how optometry is responding through telemedicine.

Dr Jerry Vincent, a seasoned expert on disaster preparedness and lecturer of optometry and public health at Rangsit and Thammasat Universities in Thailand challenged us to think outside the box on how to make eye care services more effective for people in conflict and disaster affected situations.

Reaching out the most needed populations requires us to feel confident about evaluating the vision of different types of patients. Dr Sandra Block shared her expertise on how to offer the best professional care to patients with intellectual disability. Besides the technical skills, the tips on communication and attitude that can enable optometrists to treat these patients with confidence were highly valued by participants and reinforced our belief that optometrists can touch and change lives. Similarly, Dr Tracy Matchinski offered a comprehensive lecture on assistive technology in vision rehabilitation highlighting resources and technologies currently available for low vision professionals. These two lectures were COPE accredited courses and we are very grateful to Drs Block and Matchinski for their support helping us introduce this innovation in our meeting.

Offering updates on current VOSH/International projects were Dr Deepa Chandrasekaran who talked about her experience teaching about contact lenses at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana as part of our CL lab in Ghana project. From Mexico, Dr Emiliano Teran, faculty adviser of our SVOSH chapter at the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa offered a peak

view into the school screenings that UAS last year optometry students carry out among young people in need and the potential to grow it once the Vision for Life Foundation funded project can start implementation.

In between sessions, participants were able to meet our main sponsor NVI, and exhibitors Plenoptika, Bernell, Everyone for Veterans and Key Travel. We were also delighted to announce chapter of the month recognitions, welcomed Dr Michael Ciszek as a new fellow to VOSH/International and Dr Jene Barth, Dr Daniel Twelker and Brenda Kraus as new members of the Franklin Harms Society. Young talent was present in the meeting through the winning video prepared by SVOSH-Manila Central University chapter and the three winners of the photo competition.

The online format enabled more international participants to join the sessions of their interest and offering simultaneous translation for some sessions made our meeting more inclusive. The patience and flexibility of our participants allowed us to overcome the few technical challenges that surfaced during the meeting. The videos of the sessions will be available to watch in our Vimeo account soon.

While we hope that in 2021, we can meet face to face again, offering the sessions online to our international members who cannot attend in person is a good way to maintain engagement and continue sharing knowledge and expertise across our chapters.

Maria Arce-Moreira
Executive Director