

## Nicaragua launches inter-institutional dialogue as part of the Children's Vision and Learning project

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, the International Forum to launch the inter-institutional work of the “Vision and Learning; an infinite vision” project took place at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN-Managua). The Forum was named in honor of Dr. Miguel Silva Mayorga who was the founder of the Medical Optometry career at UNAN. Although no longer with us, Dr. Silva occupies a special place in the hearts of UNAN and VOSH/International members. The seventh class of Nicaraguan optometrists who graduated from UNAN is a testament to his vision and leadership.

The Forum was organized by Dr. Jairo Mercado, lecturer at the optometry program at UNAN and project coordinator of this collaborative initiative between UNAN-Managua and VOSH/International. The project aims at using supervised school screenings by the students of optometry at UNAN to collect data following a recognized protocol to generate evidence to influence the development of a national plan for eye health in Nicaragua. Students of the first two years participate in awareness raising while those of the last years are actively engaged in the clinical work. The Dean of the university highlighted that optometrists play a significant role in the comprehensive health care of the population throughout the life cycle

This high-level event had the presence of representatives from the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education who presented Nicaragua's Community and Family Health Model (MOSAFC for its Spanish acronym) and inclusive education in Nicaragua. Other key local partners attending the event were the municipalities that help with the coordination of the humanitarian work. UNAN's optometry program shared the progress made through the rural satellites of UNAN called UNICAMs (Universidad del Campo) in La Dalia, Nueva Guinea, and San Juan del Sur where optometry is being taught and for which VOSH/International donated equipment.

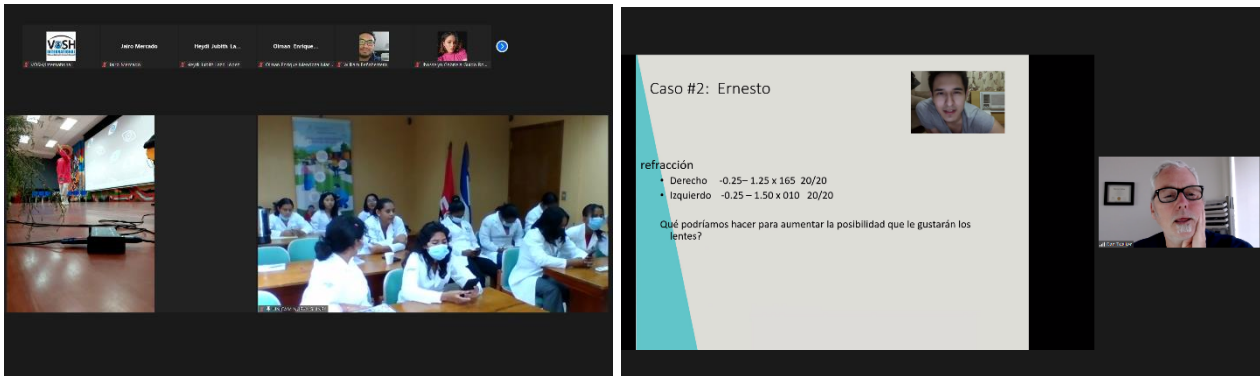


*Image 1 In-person attendees to the International Forum Vision and Education, UNAN Managua*

The program included views from the students on their role in the development of a health system that is comprehensive and multi-disciplinary and the steps that the program is already taking to support the development of optometry and Nicaragua and in the Central American region with the establishment of a pediatric optometry specialization and the initial results of the eye health indicators.

The broader eye health context was offered with presentations from the optometry curriculum developed for Latin America by the education committee of the Latin American Association of

Optometry and Optics (ALDOO), the global Sustainable development Goals framework and its connection with visual health offered by the OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation and the 2030 Strategy led by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. While in Managua, IAPB



Images 2 and 3 Zoom attendees across Nicaragua following the sessions

held a brainstorming exercise with the authorities attending the event, the Zoom attendees benefitted from a lecture on clinical cases led by Dr. Daniel Twelker, Past President of VOSH/International.

The meeting was held in a hybrid format allowing the participation of students and professionals across Nicaragua and from abroad. There were 200 participants online of which 76% were from Nicaragua and 24% from other countries.

VOSH/International congratulates Dr. Mercado, his team, and the optometry students who made this Forum a reality. In 2023, the project will continue with the screenings, analysis, and awareness raising throughout Nicaragua. We will be sharing the results progressively. The learnings from this work will be shared with SVOSH chapters in Peru and Mexico, which are other partners of this Children's Vision initiative.

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