

## Advancing Global Optometry: Highlights from the AFCO-CEPHII Research Day

On December 7, 2024, the African Council of Optometry (AFCO) and the Centre for Eye Care and Public Health Intervention Initiative (CEPHII) hosted a landmark event—**Research Day**. This virtual gathering brought together over 70 professionals and academics from across the globe, representing countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, India, the UK, and Australia. The event showcased cutting-edge research in optometry and public health while emphasizing collaboration and evidence-based policymaking.

### *Opening the Stage for Collaboration*

The day commenced with a prayer and a pre-recorded welcome address from **Dr. Enowntai Ayukotang**, President of AFCO. He praised African optometrists for their growing contributions to international forums, such as the recent American Academy of Optometry meeting in Indianapolis. He stressed the need for collaboration, research, and policy advocacy to improve functional vision for all, particularly in underserved regions. His address set the tone for an event centered on innovation, partnership, and impact.

### *A Cross-Continental Exchange of Ideas*

Moderated by **Professor Nalova Westbrook**, a social scientist and literacy educator from Pennsylvania State University, the event featured a robust lineup of presenters. Key speakers included:

- **Dr. Godwin Oveseri Ogbomo** (University of Highlands and Islands, UK),
- **A/Prof. Bernadine Ekpenyong** (University of Calabar, Nigeria),
- **Dr Obinwanne Chukwuemeka Junior** (Private Practitioner, Abuja Nigeria)
- **Dr. Ngozi K. Ezinne** (Western Sydney University, Australia),
- **Dr. Maritjie Richter** (University of Johannesburg, South Africa),
- **Dr. Fahad Khan** (Western Sydney University, Australia), and
- **Dr. Precious Uwagboe** (University of Benin, Nigeria).

These presentations addressed critical topics such as building strong cross-continental research partnerships to tackle shared challenges, using research findings to shape evidence-based policies, and ensuring global recognition for African contributions to optometry and public health.

### *Bridging Research and Practice*

A significant highlight of the event was the feedback session, where a distinguished panel of researchers and journal editors, including Dr. Mistra Stuti, Dr. Pavan Verkichala and Dr. Ving Fai Chan, offered invaluable guidance to presenters. This session emphasized strategies for enhancing study quality, improving research design, and increasing publication success in high-impact journals.

The event also provided attendees with the opportunity to earn **Continuing Education (CE) points**, a vital component of professional development in optometry.

### *Reflections and Key Takeaways*

The Research Day underscored three essential pillars for advancing optometry in Africa:

1. **Collaboration:** Strong international partnerships are crucial to addressing regional and global health challenges.

2. **Policy Influence:** Translating research into actionable policies ensures sustainable improvements in eye care access and outcomes.
3. **Global Recognition:** African optometrists' contributions must continue to gain visibility to foster equitable knowledge exchange.

Attendee feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants commending the event for its focus on fostering collaboration and elevating the visibility of African optometry research.

#### *A Vision for the Future*

**Dr. Levi Osuagwu**, Director of Research and Advocacy for AFCO, closed the event by reaffirming AFCO's commitment to providing platforms for research dissemination and collaboration. He highlighted the importance of inspiring the next generation of optometrists and public health leaders to drive innovation and impact in the field.

The AFCO-CEPHII Research Day was a testament to the power of collaboration and perseverance in advancing global health equity. By bridging research and practice, African optometry professionals are poised to tackle both local and global health challenges, driving progress in public health and vision care.

As the global community continues to recognize the contributions of African researchers, platforms like the AFCO-CEPHII Research Day will remain pivotal in shaping the future of optometry.

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