

**President's Insights**  
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**Hector Santiago, OD, PhD, FAAO**  
**Children's vision: a call to action**



The theme of the VOSH/International Meeting in Boston is "Caring for Our Children's Vision." Why should we care?

The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 13 million children between 5 and 15 years of age are visually impaired worldwide due to uncorrected refractive error. Systematic reviews show that 200 to 300 million children suffer from binocular disorders and another 80 million from accommodative dysfunctions.

As optometrists, we are aware of the consequences of uncorrected refractive errors. Hyperopia and anisometropia are associated with deficits in reading performance. High hyperopia is associated with strabismus and amblyopia. In myopia, the risk of retinal detachment, myopic macular degeneration, glaucoma, and cataracts increases significantly. Binocular and

accommodative dysfunctions cause visual instability, hinder tracking, slow reading, impair comprehension, and contribute to anxiety and reduced self-esteem.

Not all children are created equal. We found that the prevalence of astigmatism (1 or more cylinder) was about 10% in children of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Yet, it was 28% among indigenous Guna children of Panama. These indigenous children are at a significant academic disadvantage.

In optometry school, all students are exposed to pediatric eye care, including the diagnosis, treatment, and management of refractive error, binocular, and accommodative dysfunctions in children. Although only a fraction become pediatric optometry specialists, all of us can potentially provide pediatric eye care.

In the United States, the AOA InfantSEE program, Eyecare4Kids, Eyes of Hope, the Children's Eye Foundation, and Changing Lives through Lenses are examples of successful programs where the professional, private, and public sectors collaborate.

However, to serve the needs of children, we all must continue to move forward. For one thing, our schools of optometry should expose students to as many young children as possible. For the past 20 years, second-year students from my school of optometry have been visiting centers of the New York Foundling Foundation. They conduct basic vision screenings for 2- to 4-year-old children to determine which children need a comprehensive examination. These children are referred to local optometrists and the school clinic for further evaluation. Exposure to young children early in their studies helps them develop their clinical skills. But most importantly, they build their confidence in examining young children.

The American Optometric Association and the American Academy of Optometry offer many annual courses on pediatric optometry. The College of Optometrists in Vision Development and the Optometric Extension Program

Foundation provide structured programs and certifications. We have a golden opportunity to update our knowledge and skills.

One of the New York Foundling centers that our students visit has a sign that reads, "The Future of the World is in This Classroom." This is true: if we want a healthier, better-educated, productive, and happier society, we should start by addressing the eye care needs of our children. In the many humanitarian clinics that VOSH/International holds annually around the world, we always welcome the opportunity to serve the needs of children, because they are the future of the world.

