

Optometry Students lead global conversation on the future of optometry

For the third consecutive year, OPTOGLOBE and VOSH/International partnered to deliver the Global Optometry Student Summit (GOSS), bringing together hundreds of students and optometrists representing 34 countries¹ from 9 to 12 July for four regional sessions focused on the theme, **Global Vision Health 2026: Empowering the next generation through technological integration and infrastructure standards**, set the tone for an event designed by students, led by students and centred on the future they are helping create.

The student-led Summit's Organising Committee, chaired by Laraiba Iftikhar from Pakistan and supported by students and recent graduates from Jordan, the Philippines, Oman, Iraq, Haiti, Nigeria, among others, worked alongside OPTOGLOBE founder, Pemije Gadimoh, to shape a programme that combined regional perspectives, expert presentations and student discussions. Each day opened with reflections from OPTOGLOBE regional directors before moving into presentations and breakout groups that encouraged open discussion, peer learning and cross-regional exchanges. By the end of the fourth day, the conversations had grown so active that participants needed more time to continue them.



The Summit's regional sessions connected shared global challenges

The Asia and Oceania session featured WCO President-Elect, Dr Rajeev Prasad, who encouraged students to embrace emerging technologies, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous professional development as pillars of modern optometric practice.

Entrepreneur, business strategist and industry educator Siddarth Salecha built on this message by focusing on the transition from academic learning to real-world professional practice. He emphasised the importance of clinical confidence, communication, leadership, entrepreneurship and practice management as optometry students prepare for life beyond university.

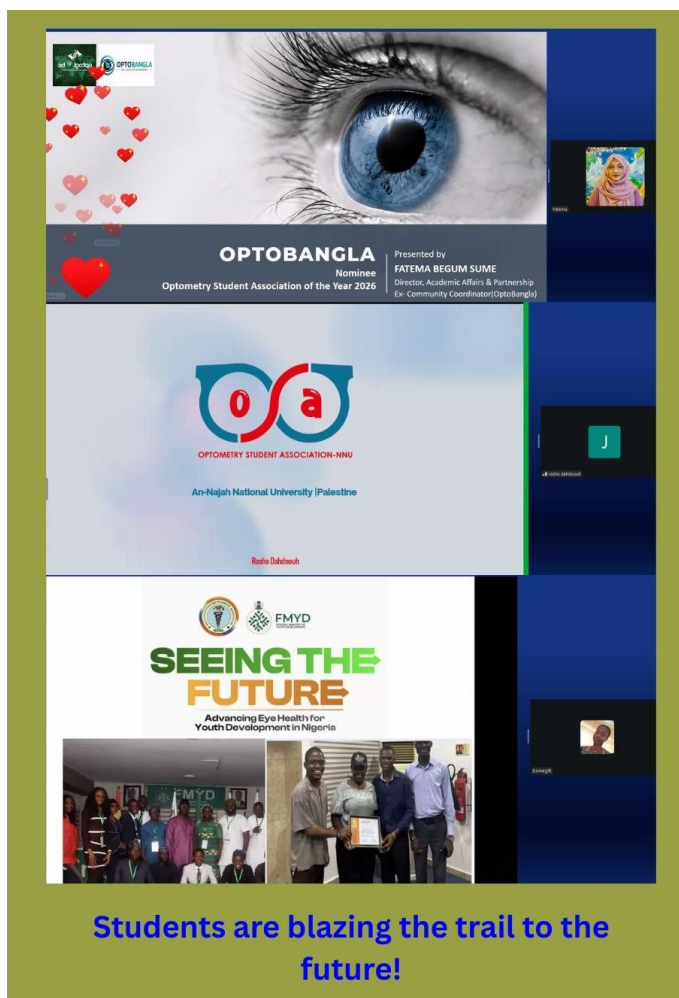
Dr Yogitha Rajgandhi shared valuable insights on paediatric eye care, highlighting the importance of timely and empathetic intervention to prevent long-term visual

¹ Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Canada, Cameroon, China, DR Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Haiti, India, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Malawi, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland, Uganda, United States, United Kingdom, Yemen, Zimbabwe.

complications. The session also showcased student research, with Wyndae Ricci Buenaobra, an optometry student from the Philippines, presenting her research on vision and academic performance, and Peace Ernest, a Nigerian student, sharing her research.

The second day focused on the Middle East and featured Dr Zoelfigar Mohamed from Sudan, who addressed students' concerns about applying theoretical knowledge in clinical settings, communicating effectively with patients and supervisors, managing time efficiently and adapting to the realities of practice. His presentation highlighted the importance of clinical placements, research integration, evidence-based practice and reflective learning, while reminding students that preparing competent optometrists is a shared responsibility

Dr Hawa Mahffodh drew on her own transition from student to clinician to emphasise resilience, lifelong learning, networking and openness to new experiences. She reinforced the idea that optometrists have an important role beyond the consulting room. Bader Al-Qahtani, Head of Public Relations for the Doctor of Optometry Club at King Saud University, then shared how digital media can support educational campaigns, mentorship and community outreach.



The clear message of the second day was that the future of optometry goes beyond clinical expertise alone. Through outreach activities, public awareness programmes, and professional engagement, optometrists can contribute significantly to improving eye health within their communities while strengthening the profession.

The Americas session highlighted how innovation, collaboration, and strong educational foundations can transform eye care worldwide. Students presented digital innovations designed to reshape healthcare, improve patient care, strengthen healthcare systems, and expand access to quality vision services, particularly in underserved communities. The PathNema, an artificial intelligence-powered platform developed by Nigerian optometry student Martins Obe to support the diagnosis and learning of

ocular diseases.

Dr. Howard Purcell, President and CEO of the New England College of Optometry (USA), encouraged students to see themselves as the future leaders who will design healthcare systems that expand access to quality eye care worldwide.

He observed that optometry worldwide faces common challenges in education, accessibility, workforce development, and equitable patient care and encouraged students to consider how to integrate technology to improve patient care and education, strengthen educational infrastructure and professional standards, prepare a digitally skilled and future-ready workforce, develop community-focused and equitable healthcare solutions, and ensure ethical and responsible use of health data and emerging technologies.

Tiwonge Phiri, presented findings from OPTOGLOBE's "Equipping the Future" research, which examined access to diagnostic instruments among optometry students in 13 countries and revealed significant disparities in access to essential clinical equipment.

The Summit concluded with the Europe & Africa session. Starting the session, Moses Adetoro, President of the African Federation of Optometry Students (AFOS) reminded participants that great leaders are defined by the positive impact they create.

Dr Cindy Tromans, WCO President, reflected on her professional journey and the evolving role of optometrists in modern healthcare. She encouraged students to remain curious and compassionate, and reminded participants that leadership begins with a commitment to continuous learning and service.

This was the first Summit where European students participated. Representatives from Switzerland and Moldova introduced the new European Academy of Optometry and Optics (EAOO) Student Special Interest Group and their plans.

During the final day of the 2026 Summit, the Optometry Student Association (OSA) of the Year Award was elected. The award honours a national student organisation that demonstrates how leadership can extend beyond the classroom and into service, advocacy and professional engagement.

The finalist associations and their representatives included:

- National Optometric Students' Association (NOSA), Nigeria, Divine Gift Orji
- Makerere University Optometry Students' Association (MUOSA), Uganda, Nakayayiza Gertrude
- Optometry Students' Association- An-Najah National University, Palestine, Rasha Dahdou
- OPTOBANGLA, Bangladesh, Fatema Sume
- Malawi University Optometry Students' Association (MUOSA), Malawi, Moffat Mitimutwa

Following the individual presentations, the judging panel, comprising Prof. Kovin Naidoo and Donna Mikulecky of OGS, selected the National Optometric Students' Association (NOSA), Nigeria, as the 2026 OSA of the Year Award winner. The winning association will receive a small prize provided by OGS.



The 3rd Global Optometry Student Summit (GOSS 2026) was far more than a summit; it was a celebration of ideas, leadership, and a shared commitment to building a stronger future for global eye care and the next generations of optometrists. Its success reflected the leadership, commitment, and teamwork of the OPTOGLOBE Summit Organising Committee.

As Laraiba Iftikhar, Chair of the Summit's Organising Committee, stated *"the future of optometry is not something we wait for; it is something we create together."* Optometry students worldwide are already helping to create that future.

VOSH/International was honoured to partner in this year's Summit. This event was made possible thanks to the hard work, creativity, leadership, and commitment of optometry students around the world. We join OPTOGLOBE in expressing our gratitude to the students, speakers, and partners who contributed their time, ideas, and energy to GOSS 2026.

The sessions are available on OPTOGLOBE's YouTube

For more information on OPTOGLOBE, contact Pemije Gadimoh at pemijegadinoh@gmail.com

For more information on VOSH/International, contact Maria Arce, Executive Director, at vosh@vosh.org