

## President's Insights December 2021

Among the many notable United Nations (UN) observances in the month of December, [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#) observed on December 3, has a special significance for us.

As the UN notes, “disability inclusion is an essential condition to upholding human rights, sustainable development, and peace and security . . . The commitment to realizing the rights of persons with disabilities is not only a matter of justice; it is an investment in a common future.”

The World Health Organization’s (WHO) World Report on Vision reports that there are 2.2 billion people living with a vision impairment. At least 1 billion of these people have vision impairment that could have been prevented or that has not been addressed yet. Patients in low- and middle-income regions have four times the rate of vision impairment as those in high-income regions. Additionally, the burden of vision impairment is greater among people living in rural areas, people with low incomes, women, older people, people with other disabilities, ethnic minorities, and indigenous populations.

Globally, the leading causes of vision impairment are: uncorrected refractive errors, cataract, age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and corneal opacity.

VOSH’s goal to “facilitate the provision and the sustainability of vision care worldwide for people who can neither afford nor obtain such care” aligns perfectly with the UN’s commitment to addressing the rights of persons with disabilities. Our Code of Conduct, which includes working “for the benefit of the communities that we serve” and “treating every individual with dignity and respect” is supported by the WHO’s recommendations that humanitarian health care be people-centric and directed by community needs and local government concerns.

VOSH eases the burden of vision impairment in the communities we serve. Our humanitarian clinics provide immediate care for both visual needs, by providing glasses, and for eye health, by educating patients, providing medications and treatments and coordinating access to specialty care such as surgeries. VOSH amplifies its impact by supporting sustainable eye clinics, optometry schools, optometric education, and the profession of optometry thereby affecting the eye care of generations of patients to come.

We can strive to make our work as sustainable as possible across several strategies. Working with local ophthalmic labs can promote continuous glasses provision. Working with local pharmacies can ensure that patients have ongoing access to the medications that they need and that the directions for use are understood. Educating students and cooperating with local eye care providers expands the knowledge base for everyone involved and allows for better patient care. Including vision rehabilitation and low vision services whenever possible will allow us to care for a wider range of patients with even more significant vision impairment. All these strategies also have economic and social impacts necessary to support local communities improving their living conditions.

Together, as a united force, we can remove the barriers that prevent people with vision impairment from receiving care and continue our work to provide eye care to anyone in need.

Let me wish everyone a happy holiday season and thank you all for your support and commitment to our work.

Sincerely,

**Michael Ciszek, OD, FVI, diplomate ABO**

President VOSH/International