

Eye on Education: What was the purpose of the National Eye Care Workforce Study? What were you hoping to find? Why now?



Dr. Hoppe: The purpose of the study was to provide a “snapshot” of the actual supply of eye care providers and the actual demand for eye care services based on an analysis of real data. From that point, we used modeling of a variety of factors to create a prediction of what would be likely to happen in the future. The modeling is based on a set of assumptions and the assumptions can be varied as we get more accurate information.

The timing was important because of major changes in healthcare delivery systems, projections based on population changes like the aging Baby Boomers, and changes in what we know about different disease rates. Just about every other healthcare profession has been engaged in some type of workforce study and some type of workforce projection, so it is important for the profession of optometry to engage in the process. If we did not do this for ourselves, it is likely that someone would do it for us.

EonE: What is your overall sense of the study? How it was conducted? The questions asked? The results?

Dr. Hoppe: The project team and the consulting group that was hired to conduct the study worked very diligently together to make sure that the highest standards were used in every aspect of the study. The standards were set at a very high level for the sampling, the data collection, the data analysis and the interpretation of the results. When we conduct research, we can never completely eliminate the potential for bias. However, all of the checks and balances were in place and I feel very good about the quality of the work that was conducted.

EonE: Will another study be conducted in the future?

Dr. Hoppe: I think it is very important for our profession to continue to invest in health policy research needed to support various initiatives. I hope that this study can be used for aspects of planning, legislative initiatives and to support evidence for profession-wide discussions. Because the modeling is based on the best information that we had at the time, and it is based on a set of assumptions, it would be very interesting to see how accurate the model is a few years from now. Does the data for the supply side meet our predictions? What changes do we see in the demand for eye care? Has anything changed in the number and type of services provided by optometrists? I hope that we are able to revisit this on a periodic basis.