



*Dr. David A. Heath*

There is no escaping the fact that an optometric education is a challenging endeavor. To succeed, optometry students must work hard to master the knowledge and skill necessary to become a Doctor of Optometry. But beyond the very demanding curriculum, optometry students and educators are faced with another formidable challenge that never goes away: the future.

The practice of optometry will inevitably evolve and change dramatically in the years to come. Some of these changes will be driven by new knowledge and understanding or new technologies and techniques. Others will come as a result of healthcare reform and changes in the way care is delivered. Regardless of what precipitates them, each of these changes will have to be successfully navigated in order to prepare our students to thrive.

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act placing a greater emphasis on patient outcomes, care coordination and interprofessional practice, we are seeing an evolution occur in optometry. Different models and staffing structures for care delivery are likely to develop, and a greater emphasis will be placed on the utilization of technologies to adapt to this new paradigm. And that's just the beginning of what we can expect to see and what we must prepare our students to handle.

These changes mean that we cannot simply educate our students for what was required of them yesterday or even today. We need to anticipate what is to come and make every effort to prepare them for it. While the future will never be completely knowable, Abraham Lincoln once said that "the best way to predict your future is to create it." Fortunately, our schools and colleges of optometry are on the leading edge of the profession, often acting as incubators and beta testers for new technologies and new prototypes of care delivery. Many of our institutions engage in research designed to build knowledge and spark new developments. In keeping with this tradition, we must also work hard to prepare our students to succeed and innovate in the rapidly evolving healthcare environment.

These are interesting and exciting times in health care and we must do our best to ensure that our students enter the field prepared to lead it forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Heath". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "D" and a cursive "Heath".

Dr. David A. Heath