A Message from ASCO President Dr. David Damari



A member of the faculty here at Michigan College of Optometry recently asked me about my new gig as President of our great association. “So, is this one of those figurehead positions or does the ASCO presidency involve some real work?” he wondered. His sincere question took me a bit by surprise, I admit, but only because my perspective on ASCO has changed substantially in my four years as a member of the Board of Directors. Thinking back on my time as faculty at an ASCO institution, I better understood the context for the perceptions about us that may have prompted his question.

For many in optometric education, our association is largely seen as a means for all the Deans and Presidents to get together, or for the chief academic officers and clinic directors to meet, or as the organization that sponsors our common application service, OptomCAS. Some faculty know us by having attended the Summer Institute for Faculty Development in Saint Louis, or through one of our Special Interest Groups. Your role within your institution probably colors, and limits, your perception of what ASCO is and does. Given that all these committees, SIGS, and other groups meet on their own and feel self-contained, how difficult can it be to run ASCO, either as the Executive Director or as the chief elected officer?

Well, as it turns out, there is a lot of work done at ASCO. Not only do meetings for the groups above have to be set up and managed, but new projects have been undertaken. We must do better at developing future leaders in optometric education. We must work with the NBEO to continue to improve our national board, and with ARBO to improve how we document life-long learning and professional development. We are working with the American Academy of Optometry to discuss how some Doctors of Optometry can demonstrate advanced competency in a specific area of optometric patient care. Finally, there is strong consensus that the major concern for optometric education, and for our entire profession, today is the decline in high quality applicants. If we cannot draw bright, talented women and men into our schools and colleges, we will not be able to graduate bright talented optometrists who have been able to complete rigorous clinical programs, pass the profession’s national board examination, and become excellent healthcare professionals and life-long

learners. If you want to read more about all of these objectives, and more, I encourage you to look at our new vision, mission, and key organizational objectives.

So, you bet there is real work involved. Important work. But although I am doing some of that work, many more people in our volunteer structure and on the ASCO staff are working even harder to get us where we need to be. I think that every one of us who volunteers for ASCO would tell you we love it for two reasons: because we are passionate about developing the future of optometry and because we get to work with amazing people who feel the same way. Join us. Find something ASCO is doing you like, join in, and make your mark on optometry's future.