Low Vision Section Newsletter – December 8, 2015

Message from the Chair

Following another amazing meeting of the American Academy of Optometry this year, I want to thank all the people who work so hard to make our Low Vision Section activities a great success. These people have devoted a lot of time out of their already very busy lives to make the Academy’s Low Vision Section the largest and most dynamic organization of low vision rehabilitation professionals in the world:

Vice Chair – Dawn DeCarlo
Diplomate Chair – Melissa Chun
Research Diplomate Chair – David Loshin
Program Chair – Nicole Ross
Immediate Past Chair – Roanne Flom
Written Exam Chair – Tracy Matchinski
Ocular Disease Exam Chair – Lisa Chan-O’Connell
Practical Exam Chair – John Rundquist
Oral Exam Chair – Mark Kirstein
Case Report Chair – Karen Squier
Diplomate Renewal Chair – Christopher Choat
Mentor Chair – Richard Jamara
Newsletter – Paulette Demers-Turco

These are just the people who contribute their time in an official capacity. There are many more who have volunteered, but I would surely leave someone out if I began naming names and I’m only allowed so much space for this column!

I’ve worked with a lot of organizations over the years, and never have I worked with an organization with a staff as capable as the people at the AAO office with whom I am in frequent contact throughout the year. Many thanks to you all.

We have three new Diplomates, a new initiative of cooperation with Fellows Doing Research, another Position Paper being worked on, great new ideas for our symposium for next year, another Diplomate Preparatory Course for 2016, to name just a few of the things we’re working on.

Still, the annual meeting and our activities at it wouldn’t feel the least bit successful without all of you who attend and provide the support, discussions, education and friendship that makes the meeting so extraordinary. Thanks for being a Low Vision Section member!

David Lewerenz, OD, FAAO
AAO 2015 Annual Meeting in New Orleans

New Orleans was a perfect setting for our 2015 annual meeting. The sun was shining and the Mississippi was calm and blue with riverboats gliding along. Friends and colleagues got together, enjoyed the setting, the jazz, beignets and oysters. As the AAO meeting attendance broke 7,000 for the first time, the Low Vision Section offered courses, papers and posters, workshops, and two Section symposia. Read about what happened and what has been planned for 2016.

New Low Vision Diplomates

A highlight of the annual meeting for the Low Vision Section was the welcoming of new Low Vision Diplomates. This year, we welcomed three: Ana Perez, Swati Modi (both clinical) and Ava Bittner (research).

Dr. Ana M. Perez earned her BA in biology from the University of Rochester and graduated Magna Cum Laude and Valedictorian from the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, School of Optometry in 1992. Immediately following attainment of her OD degree, she pursued a specialty in Vision Rehabilitation at the University of Houston, College of Optometry, and soon after established the Low Vision Rehabilitation Service at Baylor College of Medicine, Department of Ophthalmology. She currently serves as a Clinical Associate Professor and Director of the Center for Sight Enhancement at the University Eye Institute.

“My main goal for all children… (born with severe vision loss)... is to provide them with the tools and skills that will serve to provide them success and independence now and in the future, so that they are optimistic about making a positive contribution to society.” Reference: www.opt.uh.edu

Dr. Swati C. Modi earned her BA with dual majors in Biology and Social Work at the University of Texas and her OD degree and residency in Low Vision Rehabilitation (LVR) from the University of Houston. She is currently the Vice President of the Harris County Optometric Society, a member of the Texas Optometric Association, and the American Optometric Association. Dr. Modi was in private practice before assuming a faculty position the University of Houston College of Optometry, where she is now Assistant Professor and on the clinical staff of the University Eye Institute’s Center for Sight Enhancement. Dr. Modi is the Course master of the LVR didactic and laboratory course for 3rd year optometry students and Director of the LVR Residency program. She has presented on LVR both nationally and internationally and was a recipient of the Corning Low Vision Award and the Feinbloom Low Vision Award. Dr. Modi is an Advisor of the Executive Committee for the Houston Area Visually Impaired Network (HAVIN). In her free time, she enjoys art shows and museums, and loves to travel with her husband. Reference: www.opt.uh.edu.
Dr. Ava K. Bittner earned her OD degree at Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 2001 with clinical honors in pediatrics and low vision. She completed a clinical research post-doctoral fellowship at the Johns Hopkins Wilmer Eye Institute’s Lions Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation Center in 2007 and earned a Ph.D. in clinical investigation from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in 2011. She then joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor at the Wilmer Eye Institute. In 2014, she joined the faculty at the Nova Southeastern University, College of Optometry and currently holds the rank of Associate Professor. Dr. Bittner’s research interests include the psychophysical assessment of the healthy and diseased visual system, complementary and alternative approaches to sight preservation and disease/symptom attenuation in retinal degenerations. She is a recipient of the AAO Ezell Fellowship Award, a member of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO), has served on the ARVO Annual Meeting Program Committee, and is a member and past chair of the Low Vision Research Group (LVRG). She was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa academic Honorary Society. Formerly Dr. Kiser, she is lead author in many peer-reviewed publications including JAMA, Investigative Ophthalmology and Vision Science, Optometry and Vision Science, others. Ref: www.nova.edu.

Why I became a Low Vision Diplomate: Dr. Stephanie Schmiedecke Barbieri

Why did you decide to do the Low Vision Diplomate program? “School is never out for the pro.” Whenever I’ve come to a point where I’m feeling “too comfortable”, this is when I know it’s time to learn more. This was the feeling I was getting while I was working at the VA hospital and running the VICTORS program. Around that time, Dr. Roger Cummings emailed me to consider the Diplomate program. I had been practicing for five years and didn’t have other low-vision doctors around to bounce ideas off of, etc. I was missing this and I just wanted more.

What did going through the process do for you? Going through the process, as many Diplomate might share, is not easy. But things worth doing usually are not, right? It gave me an opportunity to reflect on why I practice the way that I do, to learn other approaches, and to have mentorship.

Knowing the work and result, would you do the process again? Life seems to happen whenever you go after a big goal. During my candidacy, I had pneumonia, got married, started a private practice, retired from the VA to begin a new career in academia, lost our daughter to Trisomy 18 and four more to miscarriages. I had every excuse to stop. But if I had, I would have missed out on the gifts that I received: personal growth, new friendships, the sense of accomplishment, and my newfound knowledge.
**Diplomate Renewals**
Many Diplomates renewed this year as the first year ending in 0 or 5 going forward. These Diplomates met the renewal requirements set by the Academy Board of Directors, available for your review on the Academy website:


**Papers, Posters, Courses and Workshops**
Our colleagues presented research best practices providing updated clinical approaches for optometric practitioners to adopt in our practices. The Low Vision Section extends its appreciation to the contributors for their dedication and for sharing their expertise and to Sarah Appel for her continued dedication in selecting the best among the many high quality submitted courses each year.

**Symposia**
The Low Vision Section provided two exceptional symposia this year. The first Low Vision Section Symposium was on Thursday evening from 7:00-9:00 pm, and featured Russell Woods, Susana Chung, Kristina Visscher, Nicole Ross, and Gary Rubin presented “Update on the Preferred Retinal Locus: What Have We Learned about Visual Function and the Development of the Pseudofovea in the Context of Macular Disease?”

The second, a joint symposium between Vision Science / Low Vision Section, was on Friday from 4:00 to 6:00 pm and featured Nicole Ross, Denise Goodwin, Russell Woods, Alex Bowers, Alison Lane, and Krystel Huxlin presenting “New Approaches to Rehabilitation of Visual Field Loss after Brain Damage.”

**The Annual Low Vision Section Reception and Business Meeting**
Both were held consecutively starting at 5:30 on Wednesday evening at the Convention Center following a productive day of courses, papers, and workshops.
- Dr. Lewerenz announced that one of six Academy fellows is a member of the LV Section, the second largest section in the Academy with 700 members. The Section has the second largest number of Diplomates per section of the ten Sections. Twelve Low Vision Diplomate candidates are in the process of completion.
- Dr. Lewerenz encouraged Section members to visit the LV Section webpage to read the Section’s position paper on Students with Visual Impairment.
- Dr. Roy Cole proposed a new potential position paper topic regarding Medicare coverage of low vision devices. Dr. Cole passed a two-question survey to assess whether membership is in agreement to move forward with this topic.
- Dr. Kammer announced she is working in Tanzania providing low vision services to children, particularly those with albinism and requested donations of gently used and discontinued magnifiers to be donated for her to bring on her November, 2015 trip.
Low Vision Section Research
The Low Vision Section has appointed Dr. Nicole Ross to represent the Section for the Fellows Doing Research SIG (FDR). Dr Ross is Assistant Professor at the New England College of Optometry, member both of the clinical faculty for Low Vision Services at the New England Eye Center in Boston and didactic faculty in contributing to the OD3 Rehabilitative Optometry course and labs. She earned her OD and MSc degrees in the degree program at NECO. She has multiple publications in peer review journals. Reference: faculty page at www.neco.edu.
Research proposals under consideration are: inter-observer variation on scotoma evaluation and referral patterns for low vision services. For more information on the FDR SIG chaired by Robin Charmers, visit the FDR webpage on the Academy website. For more information on participating in collaborative low vision research projects through the Low Vision Section and FDR, join the FDR SIG and contact Dr. Ross at Nicole.christie.ross@gmail.com and thank her for sharing her expertise for the Section.

Pediatric Low Vision Provider Directory
Dr. Anne Corn, a longtime leader in the field of education of children with visual impairment, has been working on a registry of low vision providers who work with children. The web site is hosted by the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. If you provide pediatric low vision services and would like to be listed on the registry, please e-mail Dr. Corn at Anne123C@gmail.com. To see the current listing of providers go to www.tsbvi.edu/lowvisionservices. When complete, the site will have search capabilities not available at this time.

Thank You!
Many thanks to David Lewerenz, our Section Chair, and our Section leaders listed by David in his opening message in this newsletter. They and many more keep our LV Section and the Annual AAO meeting humming seemingly effortlessly.

Plan Now for Next Year
Academy 2016 Anaheim takes place November 9 – 12. Please set aside the dates and plan to participate in any way you can. You should have received an email with all-important dates associated with planning for this upcoming meeting.

Low Vision Diplomate Preparatory Course
Please note in your calendar that the Low Vision Section will offer a LV Diplomate preparatory course on Tuesday, November 8, 2016 (the day before the Academy meeting) at a location convenient to the AAO meeting venues in Anaheim. Arrive a day early and learn what you need to learn to pursue your Diplomate in Low Vision.

Best wishes for wonderful holidays with your friends and family,
Paulette Demers-Turco
For the Low Vision Section