THE FIRST national optometric meeting I attended was the 1986 AOA Congress in San Diego. I was there as a student, serving as the trustee-elect from Pacific University. My best memories include meeting the trustees from the other schools, a remarkably dangerous taxi ride in Tijuana, and listening to the trustee from Houston complain that his tuition has just gone over $1000 per year (at the time ours was $12,000, and now it’s more than doubled again). As a student away from school, I should have avoided the classrooms, however I found that I greatly enjoyed the lectures. It was enlightening to attend presentations given by the people who had written my textbooks. In some cases, my level of respect for certain presenters skyrocketed, as I recognized their talent and intelligence. In other cases, I learned that some of these folks were just as dry as their books.

WE HAVE MANY OPPORTUNITIES for continuing education, but three conferences coming up this year are worth serious consideration. First, the Midwest Vision Congress in Chicago (May 12-15). The meeting is held just minutes from O’Hare airport, providing an easy opportunity to visit an
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extensive exhibit hall and obtain plenty of continuing education. This meeting is supported by the North Central States Optometric Council.

ANOTHER MEETING TO CONSIDER IS Optometry’s Meeting, the 108th Annual AOA Congress to be held June 22-26 in Dallas. The site of the meeting is the Gaylord Texan Resort - a truly spectacular venue. The meeting provides all the education you could want from the best optometric speakers in the world. It also gives you first hand contact with the organizational process of the AOA.

FINALLY, THE EVENT NOT TO BE MISSED this year is the NDOA Annual Congress scheduled for October 13-15 in Fargo. The NDOA Congress provides world-class continuing education close to home. The comfortable size of the meeting truly lets your voice be heard. I think we all saw the value of this kind of gathering at our February membership meeting in Bismarck. It has been said that all politics are local, and in a small state such as ours, your local voice goes a very long way.

SO PERHAPS THIS IS THE YEAR TO ATTEND a national meeting. Go out to learn and experience what’s going on out there. Visit, rub elbows and make friends with the leaders of our profession. And then, most importantly, come back to our NDOA Congress in October and share your experiences. Great ideas are first born . . . and then tried . . . and then shared.
FTC Issues Study on Competition in Contact Lens Market

THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION (FTC) has issued its report on competition in the contact lens market as required by the Fairness to Contact Lens Consumers Act. Links to the report are:
http://www.ftc.gov/reports/contactlens/050214contactlensrpt.pdf
http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2005/02/contactlens.htm

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT INCLUDE:

- The report indicates that the contact lens market is very competitive with consumers having a wide choice of options for purchasing lenses, and most lenses being widely available.

- Exclusive manufacturer-seller arrangements are rare, and those that do exist do not appear to adversely affect competition.

- While the report found that Eye Care Practitioners (ECPs) and chains had the report offered several benign explanations for this difference for ECPs. In fact, the FTC specifically cited the following example: Since the majority of contact lens exams are performed by independent ECPs, the report states that consumers “may enjoy the convenience of one-stop shopping and may be willing to pay for this value in the form of higher prices.” Also, the report acknowledges that the prices of independent ECPs are “biased upwards” if most sales are made when lens prices are bundled with exams.

- Consumers of eyeglasses have more choices and lower prices as a result of the Eyeglass I rule.

As in previous reports, this one concluded that state laws requiring licensing for the sale of lenses and the prohibition of truthful advertising may have an adverse impact on competition.

AOA Medicare Compliance Manual Available

THE AOA MEDICARE COMPLIANCE MANUAL, an in-office program to help optometric practices comply with Medicare rules and avoid time-consuming Medicare audits, is now available to AOA members through the AOA website. The compliance manual was developed by the AOA Advocacy Group and the law firm of Dykema Gossett, supported by a grant from Marchon Eyewear and OfficeMate Eyecare Business Solutions as an exclusive AOA member benefit.

THE AOA MEDICARE COMPLIANCE PLAN OFFERS a practical approach to help ensure proper Medicare billing through staff training, assignment of a staff Medicare compliance officer, periodic spot audits, and office policies to require accurate billing and an appropriate response should billing errors occur. Model office policies and staff training materials are provided.

MEDICARE COMPLIANCE PLANS ARE NOT mandatory, the AOA Advocacy Group notes. However, in the event of an audit, the HHS-OIG might look more favorably on practices that have compliance plans than those that do not.


MANY THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO PROVIDED INPUT as formal comments and materials were prepared for the meeting with the FTC. It’s clear that AOA and its members’ input has had an impact on the report’s conclusions.

Happy Easter!
Is Optometry Shaping Its Future, Or Forming A Circle?

RECENTLY, I HAVE COME across some interesting statistics, I thought were interesting enough to share and perhaps, make us all think of where we want optometry to be in the future.

WE’VE ALL SEEN DRAMATIC CHANGES IN THE practice of optometry over the past 30 years. Back up until in the 1970’s, optometry was best described as refractions, spectacle sales and contact lens fittings. Then, the practice exploded! Expansion to include primary care was authorized in 1979 with DPA, 1987 TPA and 1997 Glaucoma. What impact has this explosion of scope had on optometry?

I WOULD POSE THIS QUESTION TO YOU.

The statistics I’m referring to are: groups of senior optometry students have indicated that they spend 70%-80% of their time in optometry school, learning how to diagnose, treat and manage primary care patients. Then, in the real optometric world, statistics reveal that the average optometric practice only generates 7% of its gross income from providing primary care services, while 65% comes from the sale of spectacles and contact lenses.

CHANGE IS DIFFICULT. MANY OF US SAY, I AM THE way I am, because that’s how I grew up! Is there hope that the new optometry graduates whose training was 70%-80% primary care, will be proactive in identifying opportunites with the general public that optometrists are primary eyecare providers? How will we seek the true worth for professional services and be reimbursed accordingly?

AGAIN, RECENTLY I WAS ASKED WHERE I WORK.

I proudly said the North Dakota Optometric Association. The person I was conversing with, got that doe in the headlights look and tried very hard to pronounce and spell optometric; I quickly responded by saying eyecare doctors!

THEN, WITHIN A COUPLE OF DAYS, MY 10 YEAR OLD daughter brought home her health class study guide. The materials related to eyecare. The various parts of the eye were detailed, but the doctor of choice was an ophthalmologist!

I DO REALIZE OPTOMETRY IS A DIVERSE PROFESSION and the NDOA is responsible for representing all modes of practice within our state. My suggestion is that we all send the same message. Lets’ all get on the same page when promoting the profession of optometry.

I’VE SEEN NUMEROUS ADS IN OUR NEWSPAPER FOR other healthcare providers and some optometrists, that cite specific ailments and solutions for relief or treatment. However, I’ve also seen optometry being promoted as general exams, contact lenses and full service optical available. Yes, it is all part of the vicious circle.

MY HOPE, IS TO ENSURE THE FUTURE OF OPTOMETRY to be all that we want the profession to be; otherwise we are closing in on the circle that takes some, to a place they’ve already been.

IN CLOSING, THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION IS GEARING up again, as crossover is behind us. Medicaid Optometric Services, in the end of the final House amendment did not actualy take a $50,000 reduction. The proposal reduced Medical Services by $1.4 million, but did not reflect individual services. I will keep an eye on all the bills we were orginally tracking, as they have crossed over from the House of orgin.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING specific legislation, please do not hesitate to contact me. It was great to see so many of you at the February meeting.
NDOA 2005 Legislative/Continuing Education Recap

APPROXIMATELY 60 NDOA MEMBERS attended the NDOA 2005 Legislative/Continuing Education Meeting, February 10-11, held in Bismarck, ND.

THE NDOA BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND STAFF would like to thank those members who showed their support of optometry at “Carrot Cake Day at the Capitol”. Every other year, NDOA sponsors “Carrot Cake Day” at the capitol to show our unity as a profession.

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS:

- Walman Optical & Todd Fluke - Retinal Camera at the Capitol
- Valley Laser Eye Center - Thursday Afternoon’s Break
- Essilor - Thursday Evenings Social
- Vistakon - Speaker Dr. Peg Achenbach
- AOA & Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc. - Speaker Dr. Glen Steele
- Pfizer Ophthalmics - Speaker Dr. Hope Yongsmith

SPEAKER DR. GLEN STEELE GAVE A EXTRODINARY LECTURE on Integrating Infants into the Primary Care Practice and Common Strategies for the Infant. These two lectures are the start of the training for providers registered in the InfantSEE Program.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU ALSO GOES OUT TO Drs. Amy Fleck and Danielle Watterud for bringing in their babies for Dr. Steele to demonstrate the examination.

Dr. Glen Steele examines infant

Dr. Bob Nyre & Representative Larry Bellew

Dr. Dan Long and wife Debbie show their support for optometry

Our fearless leader Nancy Kopp with Drs. James Helmers and Blaine Ziemer
Vision USA-ND Project Program Update

The Vision USA-ND project is in full swing again this year. Last year we had over 500 applicants. Of those 500, close to 300 were eligible for the program.

From the applications received thus far, it seems that this year we will process about the same amount of applications.

This year has one change to the program, which is the reimbursement amount to the optometrists. The new reimbursement amounts for lenses, is as follows: Single Vision - $25.00; Bifocal - $40.00; Trifocal - $50.00.

Our records show there are 82 NDOA member doctors throughout the state that have stated they are willing to donate 8 exams per year for the Vision USA project. Below are the names of these providers. Please notify the NDOA office if your name is on this list and you do not wish to participate this year, or your name is not on this list and you wish to participate in the program.

Wayne Aberle
Mark Andre
Paul Balliet
Brian Beattie
Sharon Beattie
Ted Becker
Shanon Bencker
David Biberdorf
Jason Bradley
Craig Bratvold
Dori Carlson
Michelle Carter
Jule Christian
David Colby
Jim Connelly
Thomas Deis
Nichol Dillavou
Amy Dubois
Paul Dunderland
Thomas Dunham
Richard Eklof
Mark Emmerich
Michael Emmerich
Jim Engstrom
Kris Engstrom
Mitch Fearing
Amy Fleck
Kent Fronk
Don Gunhus
Jaime Haaland
Lyle Hall
Mike Hammerschmidt
Brad Hanstad
Mark Helgeson
James Helmers
John Helmers
Kathy Hendrickson
Mike Houle
Avery Jones
W.A. Jorgenson
Alan King
Steve Kourajian
Kyle Krein
Dan Little
Dan Long
Steve Looyens
Tammy Mathison
Jim McAndrew
Paul Melicher
Todd Metzger
Danelle Moch
Bruce Moen
Mark Moen
Larry Motacek
Jay C. Nelson
Joel Neumiller
Robert Nordstrom
Bob Nyre
Melanie Oltmanns
Guy Otterson
Gregory Otto
Taya Patzman
David Rach
Geoffrey Rath
Dave Remboldt
Michael Rexine
Tom Samson
Keith Schindler
Terry Schmidt
Nathaniel Shilman
Laurali Sirne
Joel Springan
Tim Tello
Joseph Thorman
Michael Tofte
Steven Towle
Brad Ulland
Danielle Watterud
William Welder
John Williams
Jim Woodmansee
Blaine Zieman

HIPAA Security Rule

You now have exactly one month and 20 days to come into compliance with the HIPAA Security Rule - April 20, 2005.

Time flies - so you should have been building and checking the programs, procedures, and equipment you need to achieve compliance with the security rule. And most importantly, from a legal standpoint, you need to document your compliance; including documentation of “addressable” requirements which you have chosen not to adopt because they are too expensive, not needed to provide adequate security, etc.

We hope you’re ready!
North Dakota Optometric Association
921 South 9th Street, Suite 120
Bismarck, ND 58504

Brooke Fenstad
5173 7th Ave. North
Grand Forks, ND 58203
701-238-7484
E-mail: brookfenstad@pacificu.edu

Wendy Kennedy
1620 South Elm Street
Moorhead, MN 56560
E-mail: Kennedywendy@hotmail.com

Matthew Forgit
36790 Street Hwy 102 SW
Fertile, MN 56540
E-mail: mcforgit@hotmail.com

Dr. Doug Froehlich
763-577-1832

Michael Ranum
PO Box 142
Ray, ND 58849
701-641-0298

Dr. Mark Helgeson
8550 38 R Street SE
Jamestown, ND 58401
701-251-2411

Kristen Kosir
8550 38 R Street SE
Jamestown, ND 58401
701-251-2411

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Dr. Terry Schmidt 5
Dr. Jay C. Nelson 6
Dr. David Colby 7
Dr. Anthony Mitchell 7
Dr. Alan King 13
Dr. Darrel Crissler 16
Dr. Cameron Deschamp 21
Dr. Mark Helgeson 22
Dr. Sophia Swanson 24
Dr. Shari Kensok 26
Dr. Leslie Kisch 30
Dr. Dori Carlson 31

Upcoming Events

May 12-14, 2005
Midwest Vision Congress & Expo
Rosemont, IL

June 22-26, 2005
AOA Annual Congress
Dallas, TX

July 15, 2005
NDOA 2005 Annual Golf Outing
Hawktree Golf Club~Bismarck, ND

October 13-15, 2005
NDOA 102nd Annual Congress
Ramada Plaza Suites - Fargo, ND