

# Current Perspective

DAVID W. PARKE II, MD

## Thankful in 2020

It's impossible to look back at the year 2020 and exclaim "What a good year that was. I'd like another one of those, please!" Tragically, it is likely that U.S. deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic may exceed all U.S. deaths in World War II. The pandemic was accompanied by the greatest global economic crisis in our lifetime and political and social upheaval unwitnessed in the United States since perhaps the early 1970's.

Ophthalmologists, their families, and their patients sickened, and some died. Nearly all Academy members felt some degree of economic pain—some of it severe—and many of our patients felt it much, much more. We all also felt the psychological shocks of physical and social distancing.

Against this backdrop of gloom, however, certain people and organizations stepped forward as dependable, loyal, and even at times remarkable sources of support and guidance. I am thankful for them—and I believe that my colleagues are as well. They should be recognized.

First are our patients. They represent the epicenter of everything we do. They entrust us with their future capacity for working, for activities of daily life, and for engaging with loved ones. During COVID-19 many showed that trust by risking infection to come to our offices for post-op visits, glaucoma exams, intravitreal injections, and other care.

Second, I am thankful for our staff members and teams. As ophthalmologists, we understand that patient care is a complex process and that optimal outcomes depend in part on the capabilities of additional team members, including our technicians, scribes, practice administrators, OR nurses, and many more. They, too, joined us in risking disease, some in enduring layoffs and other economic hardship, and in handling the psychologic trauma of a pandemic. We would be unable to function as well without them.

Third, our colleagues. Most of us leaned heavily upon our colleagues this past year—whether it was cross-covering for urgent patient care in the early days of the pandemic, getting sources for PPE, telemedicine tips, redesigning office patient flow, or simply hearing a friend's voice. Thousands of ophthalmologists accessed the Academy COVID resource ([aao.org/coronavirus](http://aao.org/coronavirus)) one million-plus times in April alone. All of the site's resources—regulation interpretations, practice tips, clinical guidelines, etc.—are the products of the dedication and talent of our ophthalmologist colleagues. Every bit of information had a volunteer ophthalmologist behind it!

Next, a shout-out to our organizations. First, to industry. Companies fast-tracked designs for slit-lamp screens, and they extended drug payment terms. They accelerated developing some of the vaccines and drugs that we are counting upon in coming months. For those who say, "Well, of course, they're in it for the money," let me just say, "Yes, but . . ." The best industry leaders realize that we are all part of the same ecosystem built on our shared mission and relationships. And to our sister medical organizations—this proved not to be a time to try to "outshine" each other but rather to share resources and knowledge.

I thank those in our own "nuclear professional family" who provided counsel and support throughout the year. Notably this includes your Academy leadership—and specifically Academy President Anne Coleman. What a great time for us all to have a thoughtful president with a national reputation not only in clinical ophthalmology, but also in public health and national health policy. I would be remiss if I failed to also recognize the Academy staff, who pivoted and adapted to remote work, a virtual meeting world, and the tsunami of evolving member needs.

Finally, I personally thank my fellow Academy members and ophthalmologist colleagues. In 2020 the Academy found itself engaged in complex and sometimes contentious issues of public health, pandemic policy, economics, and interprofessional relations. Some conundrums had no solution that would make 100% of our 32,000 members happy. Many of you took the time to reach out and thoughtfully and candidly voice your opinions. And that led me to contact you, listen to you, and learn from you. And while it did not always result in agreement, it almost always enhanced mutual respect and sometimes engendered real friendship.

Enjoy the holidays! Take some time to be with family and friends. And let's start 2021 with a renewed sense of our purpose as physicians, as citizens, and as colleagues—despite having some of 2020's challenges still before us.



*David W.  
Parke II, MD  
Academy CEO*