

President's Statement

ANNE L. COLEMAN, MD, PHD

2020 Is the Year for Challenge

Ophthalmology is more than just treating the eye of the patient in front of you. It's also about treating the communities we live in. And so, the year 2020—with all its symbolism—is a vital year for all of us to challenge ourselves and become more involved in providing access to quality eye care for everyone who needs it.

As the director of the UCLA Mobile Eye Clinic, I've witnessed firsthand the impact we can make—not just “we” as physicians but also “we” as leaders, educators, innovators, and patient advocates. Of the 650,000 or so preschoolers living in Los Angeles County, close to 100,000 have potential vision problems, and close to 20,000 are at risk for permanent vision loss. Our clinic has brought together a full spectrum of eye care professionals—ophthalmologists, optometrists, residents, and medical student volunteers—along with a dedicated technical staff to turn the tide for the underserved and vulnerable who lack access to health care because of finances, transportation issues, or language barriers. We've had to think outside the box as a group and brainstorm new strategies to expand our reach. In addition to our mobile van service, we have introduced pop-up clinics in classrooms and engaged with community stakeholders to disseminate educational information and services. The result? Over the last five years, we have hit our goal of screening 90,000 children.

And that's the challenge I'd like to extend to all of us this year: How can we amplify our own impact on the eye health of the population at large?

Now we may not have all the answers, but we will fight hard for the solutions—and we must fight together. It's important in life to realize that none of us get anywhere by ourselves. It takes family, friends, colleagues, and all the individuals who stand beside us. And that's why I'm so honored to be a part of this organization. The Academy truly represents the very best that medicine has to offer. Throughout my career, I have continually witnessed the amazing innovations and contributions that our members make to our patients and our profession. We are fortunate to have so many ophthalmologists who are not only brilliant and talented but also willing to share their passion with colleagues. This collective passion has fueled the very resources that help us provide quality eye care on a day-to-day basis—whether it

be *Preferred Practice Patterns*, *Ophthalmic Technology Assessments*, the Ophthalmic News & Education (ONE) Network, or the IRIS Registry (Intelligent Research in Sight).

Our call to action today is built upon this strong foundation. It's time to make sure that everyone who needs quality eye care has access to it by expanding our services to help everyone fully realize their health potential.

After all, we as ophthalmologists are on the front line of our country's public health team when we evaluate patients and diagnose and treat them according to current standards of care. Yet, far too often, we witness the consequences of patients entering our offices far too late to avoid severe vision impairment. With this in mind, we must ask important questions. How can we intervene earlier? How can we reach out further? How can we make our impact felt more broadly?

One way, of course, is to volunteer with EyeCare America (ECA), a public service program of the Academy that exists thanks to the passion and persistence of its founders 35 years ago. If you are not already a volunteer, I encourage you to enroll. But beyond this program, the need is varied and great, and the opportunities for expanding our reach are vast.

It's up to us to make eye and vision health a societal priority. So I'm challenging our membership to dig deep for the answers. This isn't something that's easily accomplished. But the issue is solvable. It takes thought, it takes creativity, and it takes courage—not just from a few individuals but from all of us.

The year 2020 is a year for challenge and the year we will truly honor our mission to save sight and empower lives—not only for those who are fortunate enough to be evaluated by us, but also for the community as a whole.



Anne L. Coleman, MD, PhD
Academy 2020 President