

President's Statement

DANIEL J. BRICELAND, MD

2023 Is the Year for Engagement

Ninety-four percent—that's the year-over-year membership retention for the Academy. And that's an almost unheard-of rate in medicine. It speaks not only to the immeasurable talent within our ranks, whose volunteer efforts supply us all with innumerable benefits, but also to the extraordinary staff, whose dedication provides the structure for all of us to excel.

And 2023 truly will be an "all-hands-on-deck" moment for ophthalmology if we want to keep our practice doors open. For 12 years, we as a specialty have experienced zero increases in our Medicare remuneration. Instead, we're now potentially facing at least an 8.5% cut. A lot of us are surviving by the skin of our teeth, and it's very clear that no business can survive long without adequate inflationary updates.

We're also facing another major uphill battle in 2023 with scope of practice. The VA's Federal Supremacy Project is reconsidering the national standards of practice for all health professionals employed by the Veterans Health Administration. As a result, the department may supersede state law and push the boundaries of what surgical services optometrists and other nonphysicians can provide.

The ramifications of these reimbursement cuts and expanded surgical privileges are clear: Now is the time for all members to engage with the Academy to protect our patients and our profession. We might be small in numbers, but we speak with a loud voice. Universal support of our advocacy efforts this year is imperative to help move the needle in our favor.

Where can you start? The first step is easy: read the *Washington Report Express*. Each Thursday, this email blast provides updates on activities of the Academy's Governmental Affairs division, as well as reports on the activities of the larger ophthalmic community. This is an integral and effortless way to stay up to date on our advocacy efforts.

The second step isn't as difficult as you might think: engage locally with your state societies and representatives. All politics are local. All VAs are local. And developing relationships in your cities and communities has a trickle-up effect when Academy leadership meets those key senators and house representatives who are on oversight committees. You don't have to fly to Washington, D.C., when you can be

just as productive at home.

Though it might seem daunting, little moments of engagement—for example, a 20-minute coffee break with your legislator—truly do make a difference when imparting the importance of fair compensation and why our education and training are so integral to safeguarding our patients.

Engagement is also particularly important for young ophthalmologists (YOs). Yes, you're entering a profession with many compensatory and practice challenges, but your future is very bright. You will be in high demand for the next several decades as the Medicare population balloons. And that is why we need your help now to build your own future later.

So, YOs, take advantage of all that the Academy has to offer. 2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the

Academy's Leadership Development Program (LDP). This one-year program helps identify and develop future leaders of state, subspecialty, and specialized interest societies by familiarizing participants with everything they need to engage in leadership, advocacy, and association governance. I graduated from the LDP II class, was the program director for six years, and remain on as a senior instructor. I cannot express just how impactful this experience can be for YOs.

It's safe to say that the challenges we as ophthalmologists face today won't be fully overcome in the near future. The issues of fair reimbursement and scope of practice aren't going away anytime soon. But our purpose as Academy members is clear: "To protect sight and empower lives by serving as an advocate for patients and the public, leading ophthalmic education, and advancing the profession of ophthalmology."

Our choice to become physicians comes with the responsibility to advocate for our patients. And if we are to truly fulfill our mission, 2023 must be a year of engagement.



Daniel J. Briceland, MD
Academy 2023
President