

Ophthalmology Foundation: a promising new beginning



Ophthalmology Foundation

BY DAVID EI PYOTT

The world's leaders in ophthalmology have created the new Ophthalmology Foundation, to make prevention of blindness and maintenance of high quality vision accessible to people of all nations. Board of Directors President **David EI Pyott** explains their vision for the future.

Through my work over the last 25 years for many eyecare charities, both in the US and other regions of the world, I have come to regard the education of ophthalmologists around the globe to be a top-level priority. Resources invested in education has a multiplier effect of benefitting many patients: improving the quality and longevity of their eyesight, as well as averting the multiple effects that follow a person's vision loss or impairment. In parts of the world with fewer resources and healthcare services, eyecare needs are often daunting – but the potential for positive change is inspiring. In support of lasting change, more than 30 of the world's leaders in ophthalmology have joined together to establish the Ophthalmology Foundation. In fulfilling my role, I hope to draw upon my experience leading major healthcare corporations and charities to encourage educators, philanthropists and eyecare providers to join in our work.

The Ophthalmology Foundation is dedicated to improving eyecare and advancing scientific ophthalmology through deeper support of international ophthalmic education. Our special emphasis on bringing state-of-the-art educational concepts and original content to low-resource and underserved countries keeps the focus on our ultimate goal: making prevention of blindness and maintenance of high-quality vision, accessible to people of all nations. Being a brand-new organisation, we can adapt our delivery of programmes in both a virtual and hybrid manner to leverage some of the positive consequences of the otherwise challenging COVID-19 pandemic.

Organisation

The Ophthalmology Foundation (OF) is a global operation, based in San Francisco, USA, registered as a US 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation. Our Board of Directors is comprised of more than 30 pre-eminent leaders representing all world regions,

teaching hospitals, ophthalmic subspecialties, eyecare delivery in low-to-medium resource countries and senior executives from the global eyecare industry. Each brings abundant experience and insight, and all are committed to the principle that improving ophthalmic education improves the quality of eyecare for patients.

The Ophthalmology Foundation is the successor of the International Council of Ophthalmology Foundation (ICOF) which has been recently dissolved. The impetus to create this new organisation emanated from diverging strategic priorities between the US not-for-profit ICOF and the Swiss-based ICO Association. Under the terms of our reorganisation, both OF and the ICO can pursue their own independent goals and projects. Some of our Board of Directors had prior experience with the ICOF, however, many are new to the organisation, bringing valuable fresh insights.

Education

We established the Ophthalmology Foundation Education Consortium (OFEC) to provide educators with the tools, techniques and resources needed to enhance and improve physicians' skills and the care they provide to their patients. The OFEC pursues these goals by fostering collaboration between educators, ophthalmic societies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to develop and deliver in-person courses, workshops and symposia, as well as online programs and resources to support and enhance the face-to-face teaching. Consortium volunteers have helped to educate and inform more than 10,000 ophthalmologists worldwide (during the history of the predecessor ICOF) and we are pleased to have them join our effort.

The Ophthalmology Foundation Education Consortium website and monthly newsletter are scheduled to begin operations in June, and the first module of the online course series 'Teaching Skills for

Ophthalmic Educators' will launch in July. Eleven more modules will follow at a rate of one per month.

The Consortium will also support continuing education and professional development, advance our mentorship program of worldwide mentee-accessible ophthalmic / medical education experts, and develop tools for teaching to assist ophthalmic faculty in actual and online classrooms. The Eyexcel meeting, in collaboration with SEVA and Aravind, offers an intensive four-day classroom experience in which eyecare teams from different hospitals create new Allied Ophthalmic Personnel (AOP) training programs. In 2021, Eyexcel will be conducted entirely online. We also intend to conduct face-to-face or online sessions at ophthalmic congresses.

Fellowships

The OF works closely with the Munich, Germany-based International Ophthalmological Fellowship Foundation e.V. (IOFF) to offer international fellowships for ophthalmologists from low-resource and underserved countries. IOFF was founded in 2001 and has since delivered over 1200 fellowships, funded principally by donors in Germany and continental Europe. This programme is coordinated by an experienced board and management. All of the funded and sponsored fellowships are delivered through the IOFF.

The OF and IOFF support international fellowships for ophthalmologists in underserved and low-resource countries. More than 70 three- and twelve-month fellowships are offered annually, including the one-year Retina Research Foundation Helmerich Fellowship. This is awarded to two young ophthalmologists each year who are dedicated to maximising the quality of ophthalmic education and patient care in their underserved countries. Upon completion, all fellows return home to share

their knowledge by teaching at medical schools or practicing in public service hospitals.

The IOFF-Subspeciality Fellowships Program offers three-month fellowships in 17 different subspecialties, from cataract surgery to vitreoretinal; it does not include refractive or aesthetic surgery. Fellows are expected to use their new skills and understanding to advance vision-preservation and blindness-prevention programs in their home countries.

A recent survey of past fellows revealed that the great majority feel the programs helped in their daily practices, taught them valuable new diagnostic, surgical and treatment techniques, and inspired them to begin regular teaching events in their departments back at home [1].

Interested applicants should note that the upcoming fellowship application deadline has been extended from 31 July to 31 August 2021 for both three-month fellowships and the one-year Helmerich Fellowship. For further information, please visit our website www.ioff.org

A bold vision for the future

Ophthalmic education is a paramount solution to the problem of substandard eyecare around the globe, due to the impressive and ongoing return on investment that it provides. Many life-changing ophthalmological techniques are relatively inexpensive and well within the capabilities of well-trained doctors. Just one educated and equipped ophthalmologist can have a profound positive effect on individuals and communities in need. With the launch of the Ophthalmology Foundation, pooling powerful intellectual, financial and organisational resources to make focused, meaningful progress toward our shared goal, we are confident as a highly experienced board, and supported by even larger groups of volunteers, that we can produce enduring change in many countries.

If you are interested in joining our efforts as educators, mentors, partnership organisations or to explore other volunteer opportunities, visit our website (<https://ophthalmologyfoundation.org>) or contact us at info@ophthalmologyfoundation.org

Reference

1. Torres-Netto EA, Gabel-Obermaier C, Gabel P, et al. Twenty years of International Council of Ophthalmology fellowships: description of the programme and the impact on more than 1100 awardees. *Br J Ophthalmol* 2020 Aug; Epub ahead of print.

VIDEO: David El Pyott and Professor Dhillon discuss Global Ophthalmology Education and Scholarships for the ChM in Clinical Ophthalmology



https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_nf2lmnyb

AUTHOR



David El Pyott MDHc,

Board of Directors President,
Ophthalmology Foundation.