



# APPRENTISSAGE

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**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRY STUDENTS**  
**L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES ÉTUDIANT.E.S EN OPTOMÉTRIE**

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# CAOS PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## *MESSAGE DU PRÉSIDENT DE L'ACÉO*

WRITTEN BY / RÉGIGÉ PAR  
Alissar (Lucy) Jaber

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Dear CAOS Members,

As I sit down to write this final message as President of the Canadian Association of Optometry Students, I'm filled with a mix of pride, gratitude, and nostalgia. It's incredible to look back and see how far we've come—not just as students, but as a community that has grown, stumbled, and persevered together. Optometry school is known for its intensity, but what often goes unspoken is how deeply it becomes a part of who we are, largely because of the people we experience it with.

Optometry has a way of pulling us together. In lecture halls, pre-clinic, late-night study groups, and even in moments of uncertainty, we've found family in one another. The challenges are real—burnout, self-doubt, imposter syndrome—but so is the love, support, and collective strength that exists in every corner of this profession. Through each obstacle, it's been the camaraderie, the check-ins, the shared meals, and the simple “you've got this” from a classmate that made it all feel possible. That's the magic of optometry—it doesn't just build doctors, it builds a lifelong network of humans who deeply care.

This year has been nothing short of exceptional, thanks to the heart and dedication of our CAOS Executive Team. Each group poured their passion into uplifting students and strengthening our community, and I want to take a moment to honour their amazing work.

Our Finance Team kept our engine running smoothly—managing sponsorships and ensuring we had the resources to dream big and deliver even bigger. Without their attention to detail and steady guidance, so much of what we accomplished would not have been possible. Thank you Yiyong and Sally.

The Special Events Team brought joy and connection into our year with unforgettable moments—from welcoming new students during the Backpack Ceremony to reuniting with our peers at L'École d'optométrie de l'Université de Montréal. These events reminded us that celebration and connection are vital to the student experience. Thank you Victoria and Olivia.

Our Education Team stepped up to inform the public and demystify our profession with accessible, engaging content. Thank you Sabhat and Jordyn.

The External Team connected us beyond our walls, nurturing pre-optometry students and building bridges between schools. Their efforts are the seeds of mentorship and inspiration for future cohorts. Thank you Irene and Julie.

Speaking of guidance, the Mentorship Team helped students across Canada connect with practicing optometrists—offering real-world insights into life after graduation. Their work was an invaluable compass for many of us. Thank you Mara and Shreya.

The Professional Development Team curated an incredible lecture series, helping us envision our lives as professionals beyond the scope of textbooks. They made the intimidating feel attainable. Thank you Vanessa, Helen, Jenn and Karen.

Meanwhile, the Political Team gave us a voice by organizing the Associations Panel, where we heard firsthand from leaders shaping our profession. They reminded us that we are not just students—we are future decision-makers. Thank you Jareeat and Elijah.

And of course, the Communications Team tied it all together. Their thoughtful management of our social media and website kept us connected, informed, and inspired. Without them, none of this would reach the community it was built for. Thank you Cheryl, Emily, Amanda, Helena, Sukhu, and Nick.

A special thank you goes out to our incredible First Year Representatives—you jumped in with passion and purpose, contagious energy, and a powerful reminder of why student leadership matters at every level. Your enthusiasm lit up our team and we're so excited to see the mark you'll continue to leave. Thank you Elisa, Nick, Melody, and Prathagine.

To my brilliant President-Elect, Abarnaa, thank you for being a true partner in this journey. Your compassion, creativity, and strength have already made such a difference, and I have full confidence that CAOS is in the best of hands as you take the lead. The future is bright because of you.

To each member of the executive team: thank you. You gave your time, energy, and heart—and it showed. It's been an honour to lead alongside you.

To our professors, sponsors, mentors, and every student who showed up, asked questions, lent a hand, or shared their voice: your presence is what makes CAOS what it is. This association thrives because of you.

As this chapter closes, I want to leave you with this: optometry isn't just a profession—it's a community. It's a chosen family that supports, uplifts, and pushes you to become the best version of yourself. And while the textbooks may close, the lessons, friendships, and values we've gained here will carry us forward, long after we leave.

If you've ever wondered whether it's worth getting involved, let this be your sign. Step in. Speak up. Join the team. You never know how much impact you can have—or how much a group like this can change your life.

With all my heart, thank you for letting me be a part of your journey.

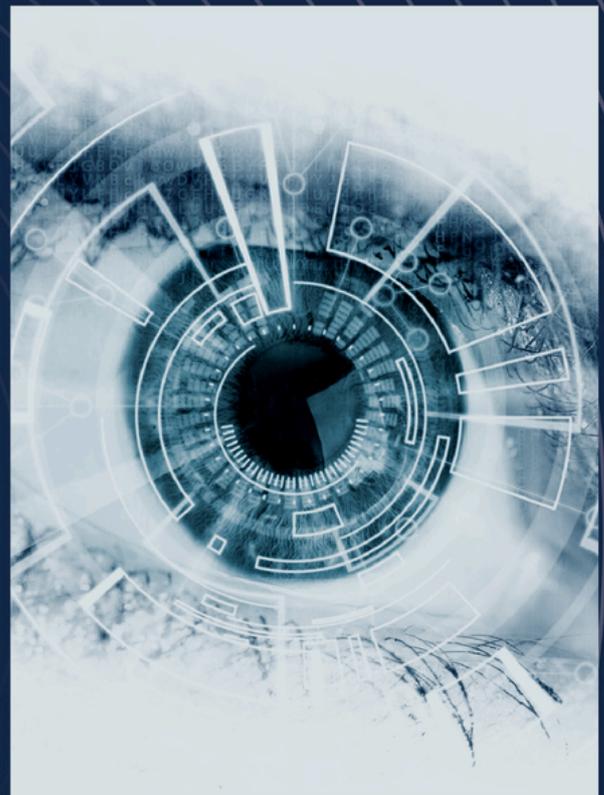
Warmly,  
Alissar (Lucy) Jaber  
President, CAOS 2024-2025

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## CAO PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### *PRÉSIDENT DE L'ACO*

# The Future of Optometry in Canada: Aligning Purpose, Policy, and Practice

WRITTEN BY / RÉGIGÉ PAR

Dr. Martin Spiro



This past year was important for optometry in Canada, with key achievements in federal advocacy and collective efforts in the areas of public education, scope optimization, and expanding access to care. The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) continues its work to strengthen relationships with our members, provincial associations, and vision partners. Deepening these connections and providing resources and support to our members involves thoughtful collaboration, strategic planning, and a focus on the profession's future, which is at the centre of our work at the national association.

In optometric practice, we understand that alignment and focus are essential to achieving clear vision. These principles have also guided my approach to leadership during my time as CAO President. One of CAO's core responsibilities is to bring the profession together to reflect on our shared vision, mission, and values, and ensure our strategic direction is aligned. As optometry's national voice, CAO uses its platform to advocate for issues of broad significance—whether that means championing a national vision strategy, addressing ophthalmic drug shortages, consulting on federal initiatives, or modernizing insurance vision benefits.

The passage of [Bill C-284](#), A National Strategy for Eye Care, represents a historic advancement, aligning with the CAO's enduring commitment to establishing eye care as a national health priority. This milestone underscores the importance of collective advocacy and sustained effort, and lays a critical foundation for a more integrated, equitable, and prevention-driven vision care system. We are fortunate that optometry is a strong, unified profession in Canada. While our numbers are smaller than other health professions, we have an outsized voice due to the commitment of our members to work together on common goals.

Recognizing that federal policy has the potential to impact not only optometrists in practice but also optometry students, CAO continues to advocate for expanding the list of eligible occupations under the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program to include optometrists. Seeing an opportunity with the federal election call, the CAO rolled out an Advocacy Campaign that included a letter-writing campaign for students, focusing on this issue. I was proud to see so many of you get involved and make your voices heard with your federal candidates!

As a national association, CAO is tasked with addressing current challenges and planning and preparing for the future. At the beginning of each year, the CAO convenes leaders in optometry from across Canada and beyond to discuss strategic issues shaping the profession. In 2025, 107 participants gathered in Ottawa to engage in discussions on optimizing scope of practice in optometry. As the profession evolves to meet growing patient needs and advances in medicine and in technology, we explored optimizing optometric scope of practice to enhance access to eye care, improve patient outcomes, and strengthen the profession's role within the broader healthcare system.

Another area of focus is improved access to optometric care. Last fall, CAO offered an Indigenous Eye Care webinar led by a panel of optometrists. This led to the formation of the Indigenous Optometrists of Canada (IOC), a new professional community and the development of an Indigenous Eye Care resource page on the CAO member website. The resources include links to the webinar recording, educational resources, and information on UWOVS student Jeremiah Hyslop's advocacy for updating the reading card used for testing near vision with culturally appropriate language. Following the webinar, CAO created an Indigenous Eye Care resource page on our member website and supported the formation of the Indigenous Optometrists of Canada (IOC), a community dedicated to support, connection, and leadership. We encourage all Indigenous optometrists and optometry students to connect with this initiative by reaching out to [ioc@opto.ca](mailto:ioc@opto.ca).

Working to advance practice conditions for optometrists and improve eye health outcomes for patients requires a broad perspective. We have always understood students as the profession's future, but this wasn't always reflected in practical ways at the association level. Over the last several years, our work has focused on ways to engage with students more effectively. One of my favourite roles as President was acting as a liaison with students.

This past year, I had the opportunity to meet with Canadian students at ÉOUM, UWOVS, PUCO, SUNY, NECO, MCPHS and ICO, providing updates on the Canadian optometric landscape, discussing the role of the CAO and answering questions from students on everything from consideration of different modes of practice, to changes to the exam requirements for licensure and variations in scope of practice from province to province.

Last fall, CAO hosted a reception for optometry students and faculty at the University of Waterloo in October. Over 100 students attended the event, which was an opportunity to meet CAO Councillors and learn more about optometric practice across Canada.

One of the benefits of regular communication with students is understanding where there are gaps in support and discussing how to address them. Several years ago, UWOVS graduates reported insufficient understanding of practice management. CAO offered support for developing a curriculum and a practice management course for third-year students was developed to explore issues relating to solo practice, associateships, contracts, running a clinical practice, staff training, dealing with complaints, data collection, practice promotion, financial, and legal issues. A focus group of young optometrists was consulted to ensure the content was useful. Student feedback on the course has been very positive, and new topics have been suggested for development.

One of the most important ways to ensure we are aligned with student needs at the leadership level is to have a voice for students on the CAO Council. The student representative on the CAO Council is a voice for Canadian students in Canada and the U.S. They help strengthen our understanding of and connection to optometry students so we can better support them.

In addition to promoting student leadership through the Council representative, CAO recognizes the important work of a student at ÉOUM and UWOVS with our annual Leadership Award. This award is given to a fourth-year student to recognize exceptional commitment and professionalism that align with the Association's values of responsibility, collaboration, innovation, and impact in our community.

CAO is deeply invested in our work as the national hub for optometry while supporting provincial initiatives and member needs and fostering an ongoing dialogue that elevates optometric practice nationwide. We are committed to ensuring a strong future for optometry through our ongoing work with associations, colleges, regulators, students, and optometry schools. Our student membership is growing, thanks to our work with CAOS chapters to streamline the registration process and broaden our connection with Canadian students, both here and in the U.S., and we are working with CAOS to determine how we can work collaboratively to support students.

I encourage you to continue to make your voice heard and get involved in shaping the future of your profession. If you are not a CAO member yet, I will encourage you to register online at <https://opto.ca/cao-student-membership>. CAO Student membership is free!

It's been a pleasure getting to know so many of you over the past couple of years, and I look forward to seeing more of you in the future. Whether it's participating in CAO student events at the schools, attending the [next CAO Congress in Halifax](#) in July (look at the special rate for students), participating in advocacy initiatives, offering feedback to CAO, or perhaps even applying to be the student representative on the CAO Council, I hope you will continue to be active and involved in the wonderful profession you have chosen. At CAO, we're proud to support your journey and to ensure Canadian optometry continues to evolve alongside shared values, skills, and vision for the future.

To know more about the Canadian Association of Optometrists, please visit our website: <https://opto.ca/>

Dr. Martin Spiro,  
President, Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO)  
/ Président, Association Canadienne Des Optométristes (ACO)



# OAO PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## *MESSAGE DU PRÉSIDENT DE L'OCO*

WRITTEN BY / RÉGIGÉ PAR

Dr. Shaina Nensi

**Dear Future Colleagues,**

As you journey through the halls of optometric education, I want to take a moment to celebrate your hard work, your curiosity, and your resilience. You're not just preparing for a career; you're stepping into a profession that has the power to change lives.

My name is Dr. Shaina Nensi, and I currently have the privilege of serving as the President of the Ontario Association of Optometrists (OAO). I didn't always know optometry was the path for me. While studying at McMaster, I had the opportunity to shadow different healthcare professionals, and optometry caught my attention. But it wasn't until a mission trip to rural Ghana with Unite for Sight that everything fell into place. Seeing firsthand how cataract surgeries restored not just vision but also dignity and independence deeply moved me. That experience helped me realize how powerful vision care could be, not just as a profession, but as a way to care for people in deeply human ways.

Since graduating in 2016, I've been fortunate to experience the diversity of our field, from clinical practice and leadership roles to, most recently, motherhood. My seven-month-old daughter reminds me daily that growth and perspective often come from the most unexpected places. And that brings me to something I believe is especially important for you as students and future optometrists: **the power of perspective.**

Each of us carries a unique lens shaped by our background, experiences, and values. Learning to recognize and respect those differences is what makes us stronger as both clinicians and individuals. In school, you'll encounter peers who think differently from you, instructors who challenge your assumptions, and patients with stories that don't fit the textbook. Lean into that. Whether you're working in a lab group, navigating a clinic rotation, or joining a research team, **collaboration through contrast** is where some of the best growth happens. When we embrace different problem-solving styles and clinical approaches, we often uncover solutions we couldn't see alone.

One great opportunity to start making these connections is **OAO Interview Day**, a one-day event where students and practicing optometrists come together to explore career opportunities across Ontario. It's a high-impact experience that helps bridge the gap between school and practice. Ask the questions you've been holding onto. Explore paths you haven't yet considered. Every conversation is an opportunity to expand your perspective.

This past March, over 700 optometrists and optometric assistants gathered at our OAO Symposium and InfoMart in Toronto. Events like these are a celebration of our profession's shared purpose and evolving future. They're also a reminder of the value of **learning from diverse voices**, from those just starting to those who have been practicing for decades. I hope to see many of you in Ottawa for our 2026 Symposium, happening March 27–29.

Behind the scenes, OAO is continuing to advocate on your behalf. With the most recent OHIP agreement having expired in March 2025, we're preparing for renewed negotiations with the Ministry of Health. Our priorities remain clear: fair remuneration, modernized diagnostic codes, and a practice environment that allows you to thrive. We're also working to expand the scope of what optometrists can do, so when you graduate, you're entering a system that recognizes your full capabilities.

Of course, all of this work is about more than policy. It's about empathy in practice. The more we can understand and respond to the real lives behind every patient interaction, the better care we provide. Whether it's taking time to explain a procedure or simply noticing someone's hesitation, these moments of connection matter. We're not just correcting vision; we're building trust, reducing anxiety, and supporting wellness.

Throughout your education and career, remember to pause and reflect. **Personal growth through reflection**, on your successes, challenges, and even the moments of uncertainty, will help sharpen not just your clinical judgment, but your sense of self. You are constantly evolving, and that's something to embrace, not rush through.

As a student, it might feel like the OAO is far off, but I want you to know that we're here for you, even now. From mentorship programs and advocacy updates to continuing education and networking events, there are resources available to help you grow. I encourage you to explore our website, follow our social channels, and reach out if you have questions. The door is open.

Optometry is changing. And you're arriving at a time when your voice, your values, and your vision are more important than ever.

So, keep going. Keep listening. Keep reflecting. Keep asking questions. And thank you for choosing this meaningful path. We can't wait to welcome you fully into the profession.

Warmly,

**Dr. Shaina Nensi**

President

Ontario Association of Optometrists

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# THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: LIFE AND LESSONS IN THE FIRST YEAR

By/Par Ryan Bui

1st Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 1 année en optométrie

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*'I could tell you my adventures—beginning from this morning,' said Alice a little timidly: 'but it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.'*

Imagine a world where the word “lens” didn't exist. What might you use to replace it? The string of letters that practically defines our profession? When I started this year as a fledgling optometry student, I didn't know the answer.

But considering the theme of this edition of Aperture is “Through the Lens”, perhaps “looking glass” is especially apt. That would make Aperture's theme “Through the Looking Glass” – which happens to be the name of Lewis Carroll's bestselling book about the journey of a certain Alice, arriving in an unfamiliar place.

In Alice's dreamlike fantasies, the paradigms of the world turn on their head. Up is down, left is right, staying is moving, and a cake must be shared before it can be cut. These paradoxes might seem at odds with the way the world works - and yet, my trip tumbling into Wonderland has helped me realize there might be more sense in these common contradictions than I'd ever imagined.

One of the things I've had to train myself to understand is that in optometry, left is often right. My brain has had to permanently recalibrate to associate the right eye with the left side, and vice versa. It's starting to seep into my daily life – someone will tell me to take a right, and my head will double back for a second before realizing they mean real-life right, not optometry right. I had a moment the other day where the letter d in a book looked weird to me because it's just a reverse b. I'm probably better at reading the mirrored letters on the chart better than my own handwriting now. Alice would've had a field day.

It's surprising, if not a little frightening, that a year can go by so quickly without entering your notice. Though I've stayed put in Waterloo for the past eight months, my life has moved ever quicker around me ever since I arrived. And it's not just that I've gone through two semesters – it's two semesters that have gone through me. I'm not the same person I was when I first stepped onto that airport tarmac.

This is not to say that it is always fortunate. It is isolating, at times, to be so invested in a thing that is difficult to share with others. Getting lost in a rabbit hole of excitement and then stopping yourself because you realize you're not in that world anymore is very much like Alice's return, seeing the world she'd come back into wasn't the same one she'd left. But even here, in a life far away from Alice's, there is more in common than one might expect.

Studying is usually not a task anyone wants to be saddled with. I'll admit, seeing the nine class course load for a semester gave me pause. And yet, this place transformed what could have been a dank and boundless darkness into some of the brightest spots in my memories. I found refuge in the late nights I'd spend at the optometry building studying with my classmates, their smiling tired eyes channeling an unspoken warmth that kept me going. *Studying shouldn't be this much fun*, I told myself. But because of them, it was. Those eyes turned that stress into anticipation, anxiety into confidence, isolation into community. Down into up. (The Timbits helped too.)

A cake that is cut spontaneously merges together before it can be handed out. Irrational? Perhaps. Nonsensical? I'm not so sure anymore. Maybe irrational things, emotions, can still have meaning. What makes your heart sing can still have a melody worth listening to, even if the words don't make sense to the ears of the ones you love. After spending a year with the people and peers I've grown to know, I've been trying to come up with a story, a quality, a neat and tidy piece I can slot in that represents all the messy and chaotic feelings I have about them. In truth, I had it all wrong – there was no way I could ever break up those memories to read in isolation. To share something, one must offer it in whole first. That is not something I can do in the span of 500 words. But when the day comes that you see me, ask. Ask, and we'll sit down at the Mad Hatter's table – tea in one hand, cake fork in the other, enjoying this wild, wonderful world together.

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# ARTICLE CONTEST / CONCOURS D'ÉCRITURE

## Second/Deuxième Place

# MY CHANGING LENS

By/Par Jeremiah Hyslop

3rd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 3 année en optométrie

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When I decided I wanted to become an optometrist, I thought I had an idea of what the journey ahead would be like: the student life, the duties of an optometrist, and why I wanted to be an optometrist. A few years later, I can safely say that my perspective has completely changed.

Let's start with the student life, which, as a third-year student, I am quite familiar with. Coming from BC, I expected Waterloo to be part tundra, part concrete jungle. It's so much more than that. I never expected to fall in love with the region as much as I have, or to feel so at home. I expected the curriculum to be an insurmountable task, now I see it is both interesting and within my capabilities. I pictured myself doing nothing but study, yet here I am, going to social events with my peers on a regular basis and making some incredible memories. I figured my peers would be too professional for my immature personality. Now, I see they are a second family, many of whom I hope to keep as life-long friends.

While pre-testing at an optometry clinic prior to optometry school, I didn't spend much time in the exam room. Hence, I shared the same idea as most of my family, in that optometrists mostly refract patients and sell glasses. My goodness, is that misconception wrong! I would have been even more excited for this career path had I know the full breadth of tasks I would learn to conduct: gonioscopy, dilation & irrigation, punctal plug insertion, and even dilated fundus exams. An advanced procedures weekend workshop took me by surprise the most. Never did I picture myself practicing injections (including on one unfortunate classmate), suturing, and even learning minor laser procedures. If there was any doubt before, I know that I will certainly be earning the "doctor" title at the end of my schooling!

When meeting new people, I am often asked what I do. This question is shortly followed by the important question: "why?" My answer has changed since my time here, as have I. Before, I would mention the lifestyle, the doctor title that I would joke about flaunting to my in-laws, and of course, the pay. Sure, those all matter to me still, save for flaunting the doctor title ( I suppose I have matured a little). I now realize how important the work we do is. One key moment was trial-framing a child's first prescription, giving them clear vision for the first time, and seeing the unparalleled joy and wonder on their face as they catch their first glimpse of a new side to life that they didn't know existed. Another key moment was telling a 90-year-old patient who hasn't visited an optometrist in decades because she thought she would be blind forever that there is hope of improving her vision with cataract surgery.

Surprisingly, one moment that sticks out most and will probably have the largest impact on my career was being told by a 70-year-old Indigenous patient, who has had multiple appointments per year for most of his life due to a chronic condition, that of all the many optometrists or interns he has seen, I was the first who was also Indigenous. During counselling, I could tell this would be the main takeaway from his appointment. This blew my mind, especially when I realized that I have never had an appointment with an Indigenous healthcare provider of any type. This cemented to me the important of being a visible face to my people's youth. They need to know that although they too may have never seen one of their kind provide medical care, this does not limit them in their aspirations for the future. Furthermore, there are far too many of my people living in rural areas that are underserved by optometrists, resulting in infrequent and improper care. I can't change government policy or the brutal history that has had a lasting impact on my people, but I can visit their communities with a smile on my familiar-looking face to look after their ocular health.

Nearing the end of my didactic learning, in year 3 of 4, I can confidently say that my view of my profession and future has changed substantially as I have grown and learned. In the many years to come, I look forward to the coming surprises and changes to my perspective and purpose.

This is just the beginning of an incredible ride.

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# ARTICLE CONTEST / CONCOURS D'ÉCRITURE

Third/Troisième Place

## THE EYES HAVE IT

By/Par Philip Nguyen

2nd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 2 année en optométrie

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Writers describe a character's eyes as a window to the soul, sometimes following it with poetic metaphors about how they gleam off the sun like puddles and morning dew. I've always felt that these descriptions add depth to an organ as complex as the eye and has been something I appreciated and hope to continue appreciating throughout my academic journey. Although our courses and professors tend to describe the eye in the literal scientific sense, I have always found joy adding an imaginative spin to things.

Reflecting on my own experiences and knowledge, I would describe my eyes in first year as large and doe-like, brimming full of curiosity. The wide-eyed freshmen was eagerly ready to take on this drastic lifestyle change, moving from a small hometown to a much bigger city. The transition was both overwhelming and exhilarating; the scent of fresh scrubs, the rush of meeting new faces, and the excitement of jumping head-first into a curriculum filled with intricate details of the eye, its connections, layers, and functions. Despite this novelty and excitement, a shadow of doubt still lingered over my shoulder as though something very intrinsic to me was missing.

By second year, I felt as though those large pupils have shrunk to the size of an umbo, my saccades reaching higher peak velocities from excessive caffeine ingestion, my eyelids wide and frozen in disbelief. Continuing this academic journey, I notice poetry mixing with academia begins to become an increasingly harder challenge. It becomes harder to see the eyes in the mysterious and magical form as I once had when I was constantly substituting poetic descriptions with technical jargon and no-nonsense terminology. While I understood the practicality of this shift, it overrides my passion, leaving me feeling lost.

But not all is lost, I often think back to my summer working in a clinic as a pre-tester. Seeing patients, taking histories, and performing dilations were my primary roles. One patient, a man in his 70's, left a lasting impression on me. I helped him into the dimly lit room, seating him on the old rolling chair. He kept his gaze lowered as I went through the standard medical history questions. After finishing, I asked him about his profession. "I used to be a writer," he replied. As he looked up at me, he began to talk about his cataracts, how they had made it harder for him to write novels, and what a burden they had been on his lifestyle. He continued to reminisce about the stories he had written and how much joy they have brought him as I got his pressures and dilated his eyes. "I wish I could keep writing too," I murmured under my breath as the doctor came in to take the writer away. We were both writers, affected by the progression of life. But not all is lost, there were still stories to be found, in the people we meet and interact with, stories told not just with our voices but our eyes as well.

Now, as I prepare to enter my third and final course-based year, I begin seeing patients, interacting with them firsthand, and providing care. I feel my eyes darting around a room with nervous anticipation every time I think about it. However, through the lens of both academics and poetry, I have come to understand that a balance between these two are crucial. School gives me the knowledge to see these things, but poetry reminds me why I look in the first place. As I move forward in these last two years, I hope to better my vision, not just to understand the eye as an organ, but to recognize the many stories that are held in it, the lives it can touch, and the depth beyond simple dioptres.

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# A CLEARER VIEW ON INDUSTRY DISRUPTORS AND THE FUTURE OF OPTOMETRY IN CANADA

By/Par Kiratpal Hothi

3rd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 3 année en optométrie

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It started with an Optometry podcast.

The host of the show casually mentioned that a Disruptor was rapidly expanding into Canada. I had vaguely heard of the massive optical chain with roots in the UK, but I hadn't realized the scale of its influence or what its arrival could mean for optometry here at home. Curious and slightly wary, I began to dig deeper. What I found changed the way I viewed the future of my profession.

Through the lens of history, this brand has consistently disrupted traditional optometric models in every country it enters. At first glance, the appeal is obvious: affordable eyewear, simplified services, and a sleek retail experience. But behind the polished exterior lies a more complex narrative that many Canadian optometrists fear may unfold here as it has overseas.

In the UK, for instance, Optometry has shifted from a healthcare-first model to one that's increasingly retail-driven. Independent clinics struggled to compete with low prices and high-volume strategies. Business interests often got in the way of clinical decision-making and autonomy. In Australia and New Zealand, similar patterns emerged. What once was a profession grounded in patient care began to blur with corporate sales targets and reduced clinical time.

Another ripple effect of these disruptive corporate models is the influence on insurance providers. As low-cost exams and eyewear become the norm, insurers will lower their reimbursement rates over time. This devalues eye care services and puts additional financial strain on independent clinics trying to maintain quality while staying competitive.

This is more than just a warning — it's something we need to pay really close attention to. We have a chance to prevent the same fate from unfolding in Canada. But to do so, we must look critically at what is happening around us and be willing to ask the hard questions.

Recently, I attended a student optometry event where this Disruptor was listed as a sponsor. Representatives were scheduled to speak to students about their brand and about joining their team whereas I came prepared to ask them the hard questions: How will you protect the integrity of optometry in Canada? Will you uphold clinical independence? How can you avoid repeating the damage done in other countries?

But what I didn't expect was to recognize one of the reps at the booth. Not only was he a recent grad, but also someone I was friends with. That moment made me pause.

It's easy to see things in black and white when you're on the outside, but that perspective shifts once you're on the inside. It was no longer just a story of corporate vs. independent, but rather about real people trying to make their way in a tough profession, looking for stability, growth, and a chance to move forward.

We had an intense but productive conversation, where I shared my concerns honestly and directly. To his credit, he didn't dismiss them. In fact, he agreed. He told me he was well aware of the criticisms and the damage the Disruptor had done abroad. But he also saw potential with a chance to rise within the organization and become a voice for ethical change. As an internationally trained optometrist who had already worked with them overseas, he had seen both the good and the bad. Now, in Canada, he hoped to steer things in a better direction.

That conversation shifted my perspective. It was still far from erasing my concerns, but it reminded me that disruption isn't always black and white. It's full of nuance. These brands aren't faceless villains; they're global machines that employ real people with real intentions, while some may be good, others are more questionable. The challenge lies in holding that complexity, while still protecting what matters most: patient care, clinical autonomy, and the long-term sustainability of our profession.

Through the lens of this experience, I see things more clearly. A Disruptor may not be a threat on its own. The real danger lies in our silence, our inaction, and our willingness to compromise without question. If Canadian optometrists, especially students and recent grads, do not engage critically with the changing landscape, we risk becoming passive participants in the decline of our own profession.

But there is still hope. We can learn from the past. We can advocate for policies that keep clinical decisions separate from retail interests. We can support independent clinics, push for fair compensation, and demand transparency from corporations entering our healthcare space. Most importantly, we can continue having these difficult, human conversations, even when they challenge our assumptions. History does not have to repeat itself, but only if we are brave enough to change its course.

# REDEFINING EFFICIENCY IN PATIENT CARE

By/Par James Han

3rd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 3 année en optométrie

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Throughout my clinical education, one theme has remained constant: the push for efficiency. We're taught to streamline exams, cut down on unnecessary steps, and even master the art of gently interrupting patients when they veer off track. Time is valuable, and in a busy clinic, every minute counts. But at what point does this definition of efficiency become a barrier to patient care?

Sometimes, the most important thing you can do is stop and listen.

During my third-year clinical rotation, I saw a senior woman who had been experiencing "grainy vision" that had progressively worsened over the past two years. She raised this complaint at her last visit, but no significant findings were noted. Before I could even begin the case history, she reached into her bag and pulled out a folder brimming with medical documents.

She had recently started taking Prolia for osteoporosis—a diagnosis that, despite many years of severe joint pain, had only been made recently. At this point, she had no cartilage left in her knees, much to her GP's surprise. Yet, she had voiced these concerns repeatedly, only to be dismissed. This was not an isolated occurrence.

She recounted another instance: a routine appointment scheduled for just ten minutes. While in the middle of a conversation with a nurse, they left for lunch. When they returned, they were surprised to see my patient still waiting—unaware the appointment had already ended. Without clear instruction, my patient had assumed the nurse had stepped out to get the doctor. She offered to pay for multiple back-to-back appointments just to have someone listen, only to be sent home in the end. Once again, she felt unheard.

At one point, she paused and said to me, "I'm sorry for talking so much. I don't mean to take up your time."

She would say this at least four more times throughout the exam.

Now, she sits in my chair, worried that Prolia might be affecting her eyes. One week after starting the medication, she had developed a subconjunctival hemorrhage. Though it resolved quickly, she feared it was a side effect. She pulled out a pamphlet from her folder and pointed to a listed adverse reaction: "eye inflammation."

Her preliminary tests were unremarkable. She had no pain, no light sensitivity, and a white eye. Given her lack of symptoms, I assumed anterior chamber inflammation was unlikely. Despite already using a lot of patient time, her story urged me to investigate without this assumption.

I dark-adapted the room, focused my conical beam, and waited. At first, I saw nothing. Then, just as I was about to move on, I saw it—a faint shimmer. A single cell in her right eye. I checked the left—two, maybe three cells.

A very mild bilateral anterior uveitis.

Had I not taken the time to listen to her concerns or read the pamphlet she provided, I might have dismissed the possibility altogether, repeating her past experiences. But because she felt safe enough to share her fears—and because I took the time to listen to the details—we caught something early. After discussing the case with my supervisor, we agreed that treatment was warranted to prevent any risk of progression.

By the end of the exam, I had taken much longer than expected. Efficiency-wise, I felt like I had failed. As my patient gathered her things, she turned to me and said something that made every extra minute worth it:

*"This is the first time since 2022 that someone has listened to me."*

**Through the lens** of traditional clinical practice, efficiency is often equated with speed. However, true efficiency is about making every moment with a patient meaningful.

The reality is, the current Canadian healthcare system failed this patient. In its pursuit of efficiency, it has sacrificed the very thing that defines good medicine: listening. The system prioritizes shorter appointments, higher patient volumes, and rigid protocols—all at the expense of meaningful doctor-patient interactions. If efficiency only means seeing more patients in less time, it undermines our ability to accurately diagnose and resolve cases, resulting in poorer quality of care.

We need to redefine what efficiency means. It's not about rushing through exams; it's about making each moment count. It's about ensuring that when a patient speaks, they are heard. Only then can we fulfill our roles as true doctors—not just robots checking boxes, but clinicians providing care that is thoughtful, thorough, and human.

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## ARTWORK CONTEST / CONCOURS EN ARTS VISUELS

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First/Première Place

# JUSTIFIED IN MY EYES

By/Par Jordyn Matthews

2nd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 2 année en optométrie

For the theme of “Through the Lens,” I thought of how a person’s experiences can shape their opinions and the incredible diversity that can be found in those perspectives. This piece shows many eyes, some desperately searching, some judging others, and some looking intently at the viewer. I reflected on my proneness to the fundamental attribution error and want to change by emphasizing giving grace to others more freely, allowing their opinions and actions to intertwine with the world and be a product of their life rather than a personality trait that I paint on them. Whether I agree or disagree with them, I’m growing to learn about their justifications and be appreciative of opinions outside of my own.



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Second/Deuxième Place

# A NEW PERSPECTIVE

By/Par Cara Aitchison

3rd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 3 année en optométrie

# A NEW PERSPECTIVE

By/Par Cara Aitchison  
3rd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 3 année en optométrie

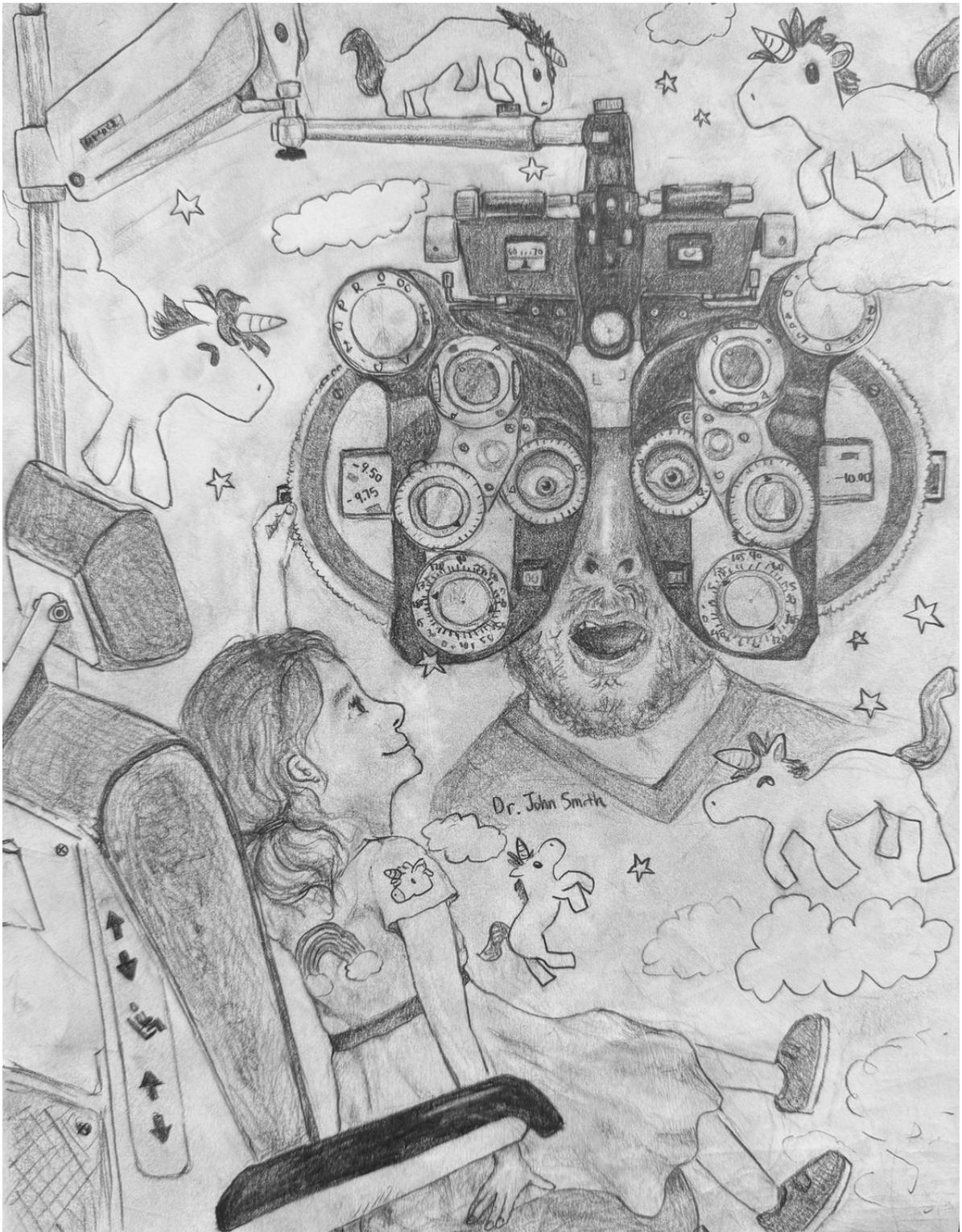


*Medium: Digital*

Optometrists are privileged with the opportunity to serve their communities in unique and fulfilling ways. The measure of our impact can be varied; for some patients, their last trip to the optometrist was part of a simple routine, while for others, their last trip preserved their health and saved their vision. Regardless of how dedicated as optometrists we are to developing our knowledge and technical skills, we would not truly expand as clinicians without the insights revealed to us through our patients. As much as we change our patients' lives, they similarly move us and encourage our betterment in a multitude of ways.

Our patients come from a myriad of unique experiences. They come from different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, hold different core beliefs, and have different abilities and relationships to health and disease. Meeting a person who has lived an entirely different life than yours is an invaluable opportunity for reflection and improvement. Patients who disagree with us, challenge our biases, or simply demonstrate a new viewpoint invite us to think critically and identify both our strengths and shortcomings in providing care. Patient perspectives are unparalleled aids in our own personal and professional growth.

I was inspired to create this piece by the wealth of diversity that patients bring to our lives, both personally and professionally. This work can be viewed from more than one angle, much like the different challenges we face in optometry can be confronted by different approaches. The winding trail of lenses mirrors our everchanging journeys as clinicians. Overall, the two individuals entering from opposing sides of the piece, blending harmoniously with the weaving path across the page symbolize the new perspectives and understanding we gain when we look through a different lens.



Third/Troisième Place

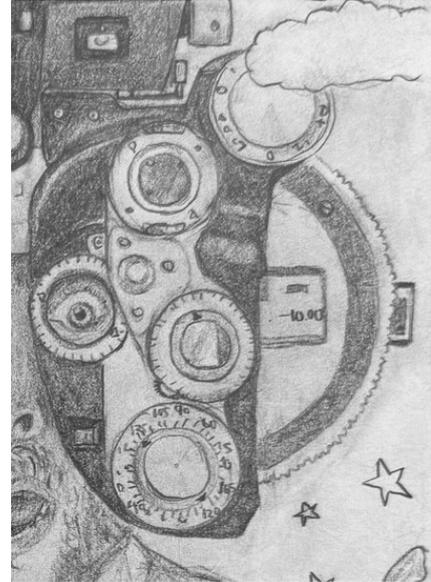
# YOUR TURN!

By/Par Longfei Sun

2nd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 2 année en optométrie

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2nd Year Optometry Student / Étudiante de 2 année en optométrie



A little girl sits in the big chair, tinkering with the settings on the phoropter placed in front of her optometrist's eyes. Perhaps, in that moment, she wishes to change his perspective — to offer him a glimpse into her world and help him see through her lens.

Optometrists undergo years of rigorous training, from memorizing the intricate vessels of the eyes to mastering advanced diagnostic techniques. But when faced with the time pressure of an eye exam, however, all that knowledge can sometimes feel overwhelming. Yet, it's essential to remember why we entered this profession in the first place. We didn't pursue this path to set records for the fastest ret, nor did we seek to become walking encyclopedias of ocular trivia. We chose this profession because we wanted to make a difference in people's lives, and true care begins with understanding.

Every patient brings their own unique story, shaping their needs and perspectives. As optometrists, it's our job to not only apply our knowledge but also to understand the person behind the patient. As patients come with their own worries and anxieties, it's important to approach each exam with empathy and open-mindedness. After all, not everything is sunshine and rainbows... except in this case, perhaps it is — unicorns and all.

