

MCO Students and Summer Employment

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Senior Optometry Project

March 11, 1997

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ABSTRACT

Optometry is a rapidly growing and expanding profession. With therapeutics laws passed in nearly all fifty states and the ever broadening scope of optometric specialty fields it is an exciting field to be entering. However, with this expansion and growth comes the increased difficulties of preparing optometric students so that they will be prepared to successfully enter the field of their profession after a mere four years of optometry school. The curriculum struggle continues as colleges try to add in the new expanding scope knowledge and skills without neglecting the more traditional and just as necessary aspects of optometry. One of the ways that practitioners can help students become prepared for these challenges and thus help ensure the future of optometry is by hiring first and second year optometry students and giving them the necessary hands-on training they need to become proficient in their skills, allowing them to see the challenges an optometrist faces, and giving them the chance to improve their people skills by working with patients coming into the practice.

There are many optometry students who, during their summer vacations, are interested in finding jobs in the eye care related fields in order to augment what they learn during the school year in classes and clinic. The problem has been in finding optometrists willing and able to take on another employee who can only commit to full time work for the summer. Most jobs of that sort require a lot of job training before the employee can actually become efficient and helpful to the flow of the office. However, with the current training and clinical skills of students after their first and second years of optometry school, they are much more prepared than many O.D.'s realize. Often this training can be greatly minimized and the student integrated into the office much more

rapidly. The goal of this project was to educate optometrists on the abilities of students after their first two years at MCO as well as to help find optometrists in Michigan who are interested in having a student come and work for them for the summer.

The survey was compiled and sent to 722 members of the MOA currently practicing in Michigan. Each contained a cover letter explaining the purpose of this project as well as the survey of six questions regarding the interest in hiring an optometry student for the summer. I received 250 return responses within two months of having mailed the packets. Of these responses, 87 responded that they were not interested in hiring a student for the summer, 80 reported that they would be interested in hiring a student, 25 of the O.D.s were retired from practice, and 43 reported that the survey was not applicable to their position or that they were not involved in the hiring process. There were also 36 respondents who either currently have a student who works for them during the summer, or have hired students in the past. Some of these were also interested in hiring again or adding other students.

The surveys also asked what skills students should have in order to be helpful in the running of the practice. Most respondents desired that a student be proficient in the preliminary testing such as case history, visual acuity, cover test, pupil and extraocular muscle testing, keratometry, tonometry color testing, stereo testing, and lensometry. There were also many respondents who were interested in proficiency in opticianary skills such as frame selection, adjustment and repair, as well as contact lens dispensing with instruction on insertion, removal and care of the lenses. Some responses indicated that it would be helpful if students could help with receptionist duties and computer work.

It was important to many of the respondents that students have good inter personal communication skills as well as technical skills. Such things as good attitude, professionalism,

willingness to learn, people skills, enthusiasm, good record keeping skills, punctuality, comfortable talking to patients, proper phone etiquette, and respect of confidentiality were mentioned in many of the responses. Most employees were willing to pay a student an average of \$5-8 per hour, often depending on the skills possessed. There were also some respondents who could offer good learning experiences in specialty care such as low vision and vision training to students willing to volunteer a couple hours a week.

Most of the doctors who responded to the survey reported that they thought it was a very good idea to set up some kind of network to allow students interested in working in the eye care field and optometrists interested in hiring students to connect. In this way these surveys were a good start, but only a temporary solution. Many thought that it was a good idea for students to find jobs in optometric practices in order to better experience "real world" optometry. Some suggested that students use their summers to try more than one different mode of practice in order to determine which suits their needs, desires and abilities. Many stressed that although they realize that school is expensive, students should focus on finding opportunities that are good learning experiences and not just focus on who will pay the most. Some other suggestions included an annual student-doctor mixer to improve contacts, establishing a group of doctors in an area who could "share" a student, and sending a list to O.D.s of student names, their hometowns, and their grade levels. Some respondents also thought that students should not work in optometric practices during the summer. They expressed the opinion that students should take summers off to do other things because they would be working in eye care for the rest of their lives.

Overall, the responses were very good. There was more interest in hiring students than had been originally anticipated. Even if every first and second year student wanted to follow up on the surveys to find a summer job, there were more doctors interested than there are students in those

two classes at MCO. Therefore, one of the desired result of this project was easily reached. This was that the students interested in these jobs would be able to find O.D.s interesting in hiring them. A second goal of this project is that this communication between students and optometrists will improve a students contacts in the area he or she would like to work in after graduation. This would better prepare students for the continuance of their education at MCO, facilitate their ability to find a job, and help them to serve better in the field of their choice. I believe that these goals will also be reached as students get more exposure and "hands-on" training that will continue to help optometrist be better prepared for the demands of today and the future.