

# Editor's perspective

Paul B. Freeman, O.D.

Last month I wrote about my foray into the realm of diagnosing and managing glaucoma after having attended an 18-hour course on the subject. As I mentioned, it not only served as an educational experience but also opened the possibility for me to treat glaucoma if I choose to. Most recently I had the pleasure of enjoying the fruits of a program facilitated by the American Optometric Association, "Children's Vision for the Primary Care Optometrist." The mission statement of the Infants' and Children's Vision Coalition, that collegial group of optometrists (representing the Optometric Extension Program Foundation, Inc.; College of Optometrists in Vision Development; American Academy of Optometry; American Optometric Association; Eye Care Council, Inc.; Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry; and American Foundation for Vision Awareness) who worked on this outstanding program, is:

*"the prevention, early detection, and management of eye and vision problems which impact the health, development, education, and welfare of the infants and children of America."*

The presentation I attended in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, addressed all of those mission objectives nicely and, I believe, offered abundant practical information so that the attendees could begin working with infants and children almost immediately. However, as I lis-

tened to the presenters, I pondered yet another possible component to the mission statement: *"...and making available to those visually impaired infants and children of America the optical and non-optical means necessary to allow them equal access to the visual world of their sighted peers."*

In fact, May is Healthy Vision Month, highlighting objective 28-4 in Healthy People 2010: "Reduce blindness and visual impairment in children and adolescents ages 17 years and under" (for more information contact the Web site at <http://www.healthyvision2010.org/hvm2003>). And, hopefully, creating awareness of early intervention will mitigate some sight and vision problems. Unfortunately, we cannot fully control those circumstances that result in congenital anomalies, trauma, heredity, or the aging process, that give rise to a decrease in sight which is not correctable with conventional eyeglasses, contact lenses, or medical intervention. And as medicine advances, and the lives of those children who are (or become) medically complex and who might otherwise have been unable to sustain life, are prolonged, we must also be prepared to be members of the healthcare team. Additionally—just as for any child with a vision problem—we may also be called on to be members of the rehabilitation and/or educational planning team.

## Caring for *all* children



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When working with any young child, all professionals have the added responsibility of fitting into the team of those who will help the child develop and, based on capability, grow into a responsible and productive citizen of our society. A visual deficit or impairment not appropriately addressed can compound the difficulties an educator has when attempting to analyze reasons for errors a child may make, thereby not being able to fully explore the capability of that child. Without appropriate examination, assessment, treatment, and/or adaptive devices, it becomes an insurmountable challenge in learning environments to determine if it is sight, physiology, or visual information processing that is creating a difficulty.

Optometry is well poised to respond to the needs of all children, to help with the sight and visual components of the development of visually impaired children as well as their "normally sighted" counterparts.

Having the enthusiasm to work with children is only part of the equation. One must be given structure and direction to bridle that enthusiasm into productive behavior. The AOA sponsored "*Children's Vision for the Primary*

*Care Optometrist*" is an excellent start for evaluation and management of all children, and gives those who are interested the foundation for intervening on behalf of children with visual deficits and impairments.