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Katherine Harkins describes visiting Santo Domingo with NECO and the 1,300 people seeking care



P3a / INTERVIEW

Our new President, Dr. Karen Koumjian, shares the story of her own path to optometry and VOSH



P4 / MEXICO MISSION

Dr Lee Lerner and Dr Joseph D'Amico lead a team of students to Coatepec, Mexico



P5 / OPTICIAN CE

As a VOSH fundraiser, paraoptometrics can earn 5 ABO-approved CE credits on Sunday, December 8 at NECO

VOSH ONE

Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity / *of New England* / WINTER/SPRING 2013-2014



By Katherine Harkins, OD4

After three years of vision screenings, parking lot fundraisers, sorting glasses, and bake sales, the reward had finally come. On April 6, our SVOSH-NECO group began our journey to the Dominican Republic for a week of providing eye care, glasses, and medications to those in need. Our

group consisted of only 14 optometry students and 3 optometrists, a smaller group than in years past. Would we be able to see many patients? Were we capable of meeting the immense need for eye care in the Dominican Republic? In the

wee hours of the morning, our small group landed on Dominican soil, aware that we may not achieve as much as in years past, but confident we would do our best.

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“ We saw cases we may never see again in our lives, and we improved our clinical skills. We were proud for accomplishing so much and happy we were able to help so many patients in need ”

Franklin Harms Society

Two VOSH-ONE members honored with membership

Dr Harry Zeltzer and Dr Lee Lerner have been accepted as new members of the Franklin Harms Society this year. At the time of publication, the Society has 37 members.

From the VOSH/International website:

"VOSH participants have volunteered thousands of hours of service to the vision care of the unfortunate. To honor those who have aided those missions

VOSH/International has created The Franklin Harms Society, named after its founder, Franklin Harms. This honor recognizes those optometrists, volunteers and others who have served on 10 or more domestic or foreign VOSH mission trips."

Drs. Zeltzer and Lerner were honored at the VOSH/International Annual Meeting. They also received a diploma and their names are listed on the VOSH/International website. If you have participated in 10 or more mission trips, domestic or foreign, please visit the VOSH/Int'l website to complete an application. There are no deadlines.

NICARAGUA

VOSH and Williams College

By Wendy Crusberg, OD

For the second year in a row, I had the pleasure of traveling with the Williams College group to the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. This year marked the eleventh year that Williams College has partnered with FADCANIC (Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua) to bring eye care to the Atlantic coast. I was one of four optometrists to travel on the trip this year. Dr. Elise Harb, Dr. Katie Field, Dr. Jenna Titelbaum, and myself traveled alongside twelve Williams College students and four volunteers (including Mark Sachs and Judi Jones from RestoringVision.org). Rashida Braggs, Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at Williams College, led the group.

This year's trip was immensely successful. The communities of El Rama, Kisilala, Calderon, Colorado, Kukra Hill, Pearl Lagoon, Haulover, Kakabila, Orinoco, Tasbapauni, Wawashang, Bluefields, and



Corn Island were all serviced during the trip. Travel between communities was done by truck, van, plane, and my personal favorite: panga (fiberglass boat). The trip lasted approximately two weeks (1/8/13-1/20/13), during which over 5,500 glasses were dispensed.

Williams College is planning a return trip to Nicaragua for January 2014.

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www.VOSH-ONE.org

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AWARENESS

VOSH-ONE is a chapter of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL. The organization is dedicated to the preservation of human sight, mainly in developing countries where there is no welfare system.

VOSH-ONE accomplishes its goals through its own missions or by assisting other groups with the same purpose.



One on One: Karen Koumjian, O.D.



At the spring meeting held on June 2, 2013, Dr. Karen Koumjian of Watertown, MA assumed the Presidency of VOSH-ONE, which she will hold until 2015. She is a graduate of The New England College of Optometry, with an undergraduate degree in neuroscience from Smith College.

Her interest in providing eyecare to the underserved began even before becoming an optometry student. The summer before going to optometry school, Dr. Koumjian was visiting Jamaica, and walking around Port Antonio, when she saw a sign on a white picket fence surrounding a church. The sign said, "Optometrist here every 4th Thursday." She saw that as a sign of her life's mission.

Dr. Koumjian went on several student VOSH trips to Mexico and Venezuela, both as a student and then as a clinical instructor with NECO. She also started her own practice in Watertown, MA immediately after graduation, and has been in practice now for over 30 years. She became involved in the MA Society of Optometrists. Dr. Koumjian took a brief hiatus from VOSH missions upon becoming the first female President of

the MSO in 1987, and when she became a mother in 1993. Her latest VOSH trips were to Armenia in 2006 and then to Antigua, Guatemala in 2009, when her daughter accompanied her on both trips. "Every trip has been special. I always feel I get so much more in return than what I have to provide. Between the hospitality of the people we serve, the friendships that are developed with those who go on the trips and the people we meet from the different countries, the cultural and sight-seeing experiences - how can one not be inspired! My daughter can't wait to accompany me on another trip. As the 9th President of VOSH-ONE, I feel I have come full circle. I will keep looking for that sign on the white picket fence. But now it will say, *VOSH Clinic-Here to Help You See!*"

Dr. Koumjian has served on the Board of Health in Watertown, and was also a Board member of the Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra, of which she played cello when in high school. She is currently a Board member of the Armenian Women's Welfare Association, which owns and operates the Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitative Center in Jamaica Plain, and also supports a clinic in Nagorno-Karabagh, which serves 200 elderly.

VOSH International

Puerto Rico Oct 9-11, 2013

As the 9th President of your VOSH-ONE chapter, I had the pleasure of representing you at the VOSH International annual meeting held Thursday, October 10 through Friday, October 11, 2013 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. There were 33 other chapters, as well as 4 student chapters, and we all were able to share chapter activities and ideas during the meeting.

It was also very inspiring to hear the summary of the past year's activities from Dr. Ellis Potter, the outgoing President of VOSH International, and to learn about future initiatives to eradicate debilitating uncorrected vision via eyewear throughout the world. We also learned about preventive eye health care initiatives, and instrumentation to facilitate accurate diagnoses.

Highlights of the meeting included hearing from Dr. Lourdes Feliciano, President of the Puerto Rico Optometrists, and visiting the Inter American School of Optometry in San Juan. Unfortunately, optometrists in Puerto Rico still can not prescribe therapeutics.

VOSH International has designed a new logo, which the chapters can use, and they have developed a very nice brochure, in either Spanish or English.

Dr. Potter also introduced VOSH Corps, which is modeled after the Peace Corps. Its mission is to eliminate avoidable blindness due to uncorrected refractive errors. VOSH Corps has estimated 802 million visually impaired of which 640 million are impaired simply because they do not have glasses. This number does not include presbyopes!

One of the goals of VOSH Corps is to develop faculty in the next 10-15 years to educate local men and women to replace foreign optometrists, who are the initial teachers. A challenge was made to the chapters to raise money (about \$25,000) to sponsor a faculty member.

I am challenging each of you to get colleagues involved in VOSH, to become members. We need to raise money for student scholarships, and to help them



financially to be able to go on missions, for this is where community and world service commitments begin. We need to upgrade instrumentation, so that missions become more efficient, and accurate.

I look forward to seeing you at future VOSH meetings, and I hope you have signed up your paraoptometric or optician to attend our first CE fund raiser on Sunday, December 8.

Sincerely,

Karen Koumjian, OD
President VOSH-ONE (2013-2015)

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Upon arriving in Santo Domingo, we met Kylie, the project manager of Batey Relief Alliance and an indispensable addition to our team. Batey Relief Alliance is an organization that works to improve socio-economic conditions in Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Peru, and they were in charge of organizing much of our time in the Dominican Republic. Kylie served as interpreter, project manager, and tour guide, and became a great friend to us all. We spent the first afternoon preparing work stations and organizing drops, glasses, and toys for the kids.

On Monday morning, our group met at 8:00 AM to begin our day. We made the short trip to our work site and were greeted by a nice crowd of people. After breaking into our stations of entrance testing, retinoscopy/refraction, and pathology, we began our work under the direction of Dr. Bina Patel, Dr. Anna-Maria Baglieri and Dr. Devina Patel. We worked hard that first day, breaking only for a short lunch, and helping each other when stations got backed up. We saw approximately 225 patients and treated 150, a respectable number for a group our size. Over

the next four days, however, we picked up the pace. Word had spread, with the help of radio advertisements and news reporters, that American doctors were giving free eye exams and glasses. Each morning we were met with more and more patients, some arriving at 5 AM to wait in line. We accommodated this increased need for care by working harder and more efficiently, and by the end of the fifth day, we had treated over 1,300 patients. That



was more than the larger SVOSH-NECO group saw last year (we're competitive!) and a number we were proud of.

Under the instruction of Dr. Bina Patel, Dr. Anna Maria Baglieri, and Dr. Devina Patel, all of the students were able to improve their ophthalmoscopy and retinoscopy skills, and learned to use hand-held equipment like slit

lamps and tonometers. We were also able to practice our Spanish, a skill that was invaluable in this setting, and will be very helpful in any optometry setting in the future. The common findings we encountered daily included presbyopic refractive errors, cataracts (mild to severe), and pterygia. We were exposed to interesting cases as well, including sclerocornea, toxoplasmosis, advanced glaucoma, optic atrophy, epiretinal

membranes, ocular prosthesis, trauma related ocular findings, and high refractive errors. We were also able to give something to almost every patient, whether it be medications, artificial tears, prescription glasses, sunglasses, or a toy. When we didn't have the necessary prescription for a patient, we had lenses specially made and sent to them later.

At the end of our trip we took time to reflect on our experience. We had accomplished so much in such a short time, and with a smaller group. We had made personal

connections with many patients and volunteers. We saw cases we may never see again in our lives, and we improved our clinical skills. We were proud for accomplishing so much and happy we were able to help so many patients in need, but we were also thankful for such a unique learning experience, both optometrically and culturally.

www.svoshneco.org



VOSH-ONE

Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity of New England

Please join VOSH-ONE and help provide the gift of sight to needy individuals in other countries as well as within our own borders. Whether you are interested in taking trips, making a donation, have glasses and equipment to offer or just want to be informed of our projects, we value your support. VOSH-ONE is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organiza-

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They were invited to join a Lasell College group out of Newton, MA that had been visiting this colonial town for the past ten years. The Lasell group has been raising money for the local schools and helping out with infrastructure projects over the years. They saw a need for VOSH services.

Coatepec, Mexico VOSH and Lasell

By Lee Lerner, OD



NECO's own Isabella Diaz and
Nadiya Oleksiv



Are you ready to volunteer? Join the VOSH team on their next trip to this colonial town

Lee Lerner, O.D. and Joseph D'Amico, O.D. spent five days in Coatepec, Mexico. They left Boston on January 15 and returned home on the 20th. They were invited to join a Lasell College group out of Newton, MA that had been visiting this colonial town for the past ten years. The Lasell group has been raising money for the local schools and helping out with infrastructure projects over the years. They saw a need for VOSH services.

Our group consisted of Drs Lerner and D'Amico, five optometry students (2 first-year and 3 second-year), as well as Dr. D'Amico's teenage granddaughter. Housing and meals were provided by local families. Student airfare was subsidized by the Waltham Lions Club. Our clinic was set up in the main government building adjoining a lovely

town square. We brought both new and used glasses, as well as medications. Approximately 400 pairs of spectacles were dispensed during 3 clinic days. Additional eyeglasses were donated by the Coatepec Lions. 40 pairs with high prescriptions had to be fabricated back in MA and shipped down later. On the last day of our visit our hosts brought us on a tour of the local sugar and coffee farms as well as some of the homes that Lasell's students had worked on over the years.

In summary, this small trip was quite a success. We have been invited back by our hosts; we hope to return in the future with a larger contingent and for a few more days.

YOUR 2014 OPPORTUNITIES

January

Dr Lee Lerner will be leading a group to Coatepec, Mexico January 25-30, 2014:
eyedoclerner@aol.com

Dr Elise Harb and students of Williams College are returning to Nicaragua January 11-22, 2014: harbe@neco.edu

February

Dr Gwynn Horsburgh and others of ASAPROSAR will be in Santa Ana and San Miguel 1/31-2/9:
gwnhrsbg@gmail.com

April

Brian Carlson is organizing a 1-lane clinic in Haiti with flexible dates between April 9-19: bcarlsonvt@yahoo.com

Several students from SVOSH-NECO will travel to the Dominican Republic April 5-13: PatelB@neco.edu

May

Dr Derek Feifke and others are spending May 3-10 in Costanza, Dominican Republic: idocderek@gmail.com

More trips are always being planned. VOSH-ONE primarily serves Central and South America. We have a need for optometrists and opticians!



Day of CE: Opticians and Paraoptometrics

On Sunday, December 8th, VOSH-ONE will host 5 hours of ABO-approved CE for opticians and paraoptometrics at NECO. Registration is \$75 and includes all courses plus lunch. The speaker, Joy Gibb, ABOC, is a national speaker and working optician from Utah. This event is being sponsored by Essilor and Essilor Labs of America.

NECO is also hosting a day of CE for optometrists, which means the whole office can carpool to the event. Registration will take place from 8-9am, and courses will be held between 9:30-3:30pm, with a break for lunch. All fees are tax-deductible as donations to VOSH-ONE, which is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The registration deadline has been extended to December 1!



Courses Include:

- Kid Care: Successfully Dispensing Children's Eyewear
- Selling More Sunglasses
- Techniques for Driving Sales
- The Power of Premium Products
- Fourteen Service Behaviors

Register at www.VOSH-ONE.org today!

UPCOMING EVENTS:

SVOSH & ALCON CASINO NIGHT

NECO's student VOSH chapter is hosting their annual Casino night fundraiser Friday, January 24th in the Clausen Room at NECO. Alumni are welcome to attend. Visit www.svoshneco.org for more information.

VOSH-ONE MEETING

The next VOSH-ONE meeting is slated for either 4/27 or 5/4. We typically meet from 9am-12pm in the Clausen Room of NECO, at 424 Beacon Street in Boston.



VOSH-ONE

c/o DR ANDREA MURPHY
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