

## **Happiness through learning and education**

I would like to begin by acknowledging the presence Mr Jordi Ballart, Mayor of the City of Terrassa, Mr Enric Fossas, Rector of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Mr Alfons Bielsa, President of the Catalan Optics and Optometry Council and Dr Gispets, Dean of the Terrassa School of Optics and Optometry, as well as other honored guests, students and faculty. It is my distinct pleasure to accept this wonderful honour as the inaugural “Barcelona International Optometrist of the Year”. I am humbled by your selection of me as the Graduation Sponsor and International class mentor for this year’s incoming students and I will do my best to undertake this wonderful opportunity.

The focus of my address today will be to the students. Welcome - and congratulations on your acceptance to a wonderful program, at a great University, in a delightful city, in a beautiful country. As university students, you have the freedom and the responsibility to make independent decisions: to choose your course of study, your daily schedule, your friends, your future path in life. Through your participation in class and in other activities at this University, you will continue to grow its reputation as a wonderful place of learning and enhance its reputation among the optometric educational establishments across Europe. And it is that theme of “learning and education” that I want to speak to you about today.

Let me begin by telling you some things about me. Who I am, where I came from and how I got to where I am now. I grew up in a fairly poor part of South Wales and never particularly imagined that I would go to University. However, in my early teenage years I realised that if I ever wished to improve my quality of life

that the way to that life was through education. I was not too bright and found school quite tough, but I worked hard and eventually managed to get the grades necessary to get into University. I was accepted into the Optometry program at Cardiff University in Wales. I had worn spectacles from an early age and liked the fact that optometry was a profession that allowed me to talk to people, help solve a problem for them, it was a medically-based profession and yet didn't involve any blood and gore – which I hated! The first eye surgery I ever witnessed as a student I passed out, so thank goodness I never chose medicine! So, education started my career and moved me into areas I never thought possible for me when I was a young child.

I loved Optometry. I graduated top of my class and suddenly had found a passion for learning that always escaped me in school. I wanted to learn more about every class I took. Ocular disease, contact lenses, binocular vision, pediatrics – no matter the subject, I wanted to learn more about that topic. I bought so many text-books, just so that I could study more than just the lecture notes given to me by my professors. So, education made me a better clinician.

My last year of training was completed in a teaching institution and I loved the opportunity to mentor and train students who were only slightly younger than me. I realised that teaching was a passion that remains with me today. I loved the opportunity to pass on my knowledge to students and when I completed my professional exams I was given the opportunity to remain working at that Institution as a part-time Lecturer, and mixed working in private practice with seeing complex patients and teaching at the Institute of Optometry in London. Over the next 5 years I shared my time between these two jobs and then

an opportunity came about to become a partner in a private practice just outside of central London. My wife and I became partners and we suddenly had to learn a whole new set of skills. We were now business owners, and we needed to learn about salaries, and tax returns, buying frames and lenses, dealing with staffing issues and all the human resource challenges that brings with it, along with making financial decisions that affected not only the 3 partners, but our 24 support staff. Now we were not only clinicians, but businessmen. How many business courses had we taken at University? None! Now we had different educational challenges – we needed to educate ourselves on topics that I never imagined possible. So, education made me a sound business man.

Very soon after becoming a partner in the practice, my continuing desire to learn more about everything I observed in the clinic really changed my life. Our practice had been conducting clinical trials on new contact lenses for several years, and I had noticed that certain patients would rapidly deposit their contact lenses with lipid or protein from the tear film, but it was not consistent for all patients, and the time it took for this to happen varied enormously. Why was it that two patients who's eyes essentially looked the same when we examined them on the slit lamp microscope behaved so differently when we fit them with the same lens material? Was there a better lens material to choose? If so, how long before each patient should replace them? One month or 3 months? Two weeks or 4 weeks? Would cleaning the lenses with different contact lens solutions change the deposits I could see? What was the impact of these deposits on comfort and eventual contact lens success? My desire to learn the answers to these very clinically relevant questions drove me to secure money from industry to allow me to undertake a part-time PhD, with me seeing the patients in my

private practice and taking the contact lenses to a Chemistry department to examine which components from the tear film had been deposited, and what the differences were between seemingly similar people. So, challenging my education and continuing to ask questions after my University education drove me to obtaining a degree that seemed a fairy-tale when I was a young man in South Wales. Now education had given me the training to be a very sound clinician, a business-man and enabled me to obtain a higher degree. The little boy from South Wales had a PhD – my friends and family were astonished!

After completing my PhD, my wife and I decided that we really wanted to continue to push our opportunities to educate, teach and do more research. So, we sold our practices and moved to the School of Optometry in Waterloo, Canada, where we are both still based, 17 years after leaving the UK. I am now the Director of the largest contact lens clinical trial facility in the world and my wife is the Head of the Pediatrics program and Associate Director of the entire Optometry program. And we achieved this through never being satisfied that we knew everything about anything. And now our research drives our clinical observations. Many of the studies we undertake control our clinical decision making. When I do a study that shows that a certain type of contact lens performs best in a specific situation, we use that information to help us ensure that our patients get the best contact lens and most appropriate care regimen. So, now we have research driving education and vice versa – you cannot be the best at either without being aware of both. My entire professional career has been driven by the interaction between education and science and the two cannot be separated.

I congratulate you on having chosen this profession. It is a wonderful one, in which you will have the greatest opportunity possible to serve others, solve their refractive problems, diagnose and prevent ocular disease and detect systemic disease and interact with other medical professions. But the optometry of today is at a professional cross-roads, particularly in Europe. Many professions still view optometry as a “trade”, that does nothing more than come up with a suitable prescription and sell “customers” (not patients) an expensive pair of spectacles, often when they may not even need them. And historically, sadly, there were many examples of this that did little to help dispel such myths. Your educators, and many others around the globe, know that this is the optometry of yesterday and not that of today or indeed tomorrow. The role of optometry is changing rapidly. In North America, optometrists are often referred to as Ocular Physicians, and in addition to their key role in refracting children, providing low vision services to the visually impaired, fitting contact lenses and diagnosing disease, they have additional wide ranging skills that allow them to prescribe a full range of ocular therapeutics to treat many ocular diseases. In some states and provinces they can prescribe oral drugs and do minor surgical procedures, including laser surgery.

This expansion of their scope of practice did not come easily, and if you wish it to happen in Europe then it will take a concerted effort to convince the regulatory authorities that Optometry is a true medical profession and not a trade. That will only happen if one thing changes and progresses – and that returns to my theme of “education”. For real estate sales the saying is that the most important thing is “location, location, location”. For Optometry it is “education, education, education”. We must educate and then legislate; with

appropriate educational training will come the opportunity to legislate for a change in the scope of practice to enable all optometrists to diagnose and treat disease and for us to become a major player in the Healthcare sector. The population is ageing dramatically and the incidence and severity of eye-disease will see a major explosion across Europe and the rest of the world. Medicine is not training enough ophthalmologists to cope with this, and optometry needs to be in a position where its training is sufficient that it can step in and fill this void.

Thus far, you have got to where you are today by becoming excellent at answering questions; we are now asking you to learn to ask questions. Your professors and lecturers can teach you to be competent to a certain extent. But a large extent depends solely on you and you alone. Do not waste your time from day one. Work diligently and consistently throughout your time in University. Take every opportunity to learn and discover by yourself, from your teachers and friends, from your seniors, from text books and websites, in the classroom, in the library, and eventually in your own practice. Some of you may choose to take a different route, and maybe end up in research, academia or industry. But wherever you end up, remember that University is just the start of your education, it is far from the end of it. If you want to provide the best service to your patients – and we are duty bound to do that – then you need to stay on top of new research findings.

The American Academy of Optometry's "tag-line" is "Today's Research, Tomorrows Practice". That is so true. Since I graduated, countless research findings now drive clinical decision making, from diagnosing disease, to therapeutic prescribing decisions to understanding the meaning of results from

new, high-tech pieces of equipment. Optometry is an academic discipline and I cannot express enough to you at this very early stage in your careers of the importance of evidence-based practice, in which you take the science-based data and make clinical decisions based on that sound data, and not hearsay or historical beliefs. Optometry changes at a rapid pace. Your job is to stay in touch with the latest findings and provide your patients with appropriate management based on that data.

I thank you once again for giving me the opportunity and honor of making this address and I look forward to addressing you all once more at your graduation from this program into the wonderful profession of Optometry. I will leave you with a quote that is not mine...

Someone once said *“if you want to be happy for an hour, go and watch TV; if you want to be happy for a day, go to the beach. But if you want to be happy for the rest of your life then go and help someone”*. Optometry will make you happy for the rest of your life.

Thank you.

Lyndon Jones