

**PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE OPTOMETRY OFFICER PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY GROUP 1
(OPAG)**

Teleconference Report – 11:05am to 1:00pm, Wednesday November 02, 2005

1. Attendees:

1.1. OPAG Members

- 1.1.1. CAPT Greg Ketcher (Chair)
- 1.1.2. CDR Carmen Palma (Vice-Chair)
- 1.1.3. CDR Mike Candreva
- 1.1.4. CDR Nancy Nichols (HSO PAC member and ex officio OPAG member - Absent)
- 1.1.5. CDR Kim Lewandowski-Walker (OPAG secretary/treasurer)
- 1.1.6. CDR Barbara Massey
- 1.1.7. Dr. Michael Duenas (CDC Representative – Absent)

1.2. Guests

- 1.2.1. CAPT Richard Hatch (I.H.S. Eye Care Coordination Committee Chair)
- 1.2.2. CAPT Terry Schleisman (I.H.S. Optometry Clinical Consultant)
- 1.2.3. CDR Larry Zube (ORFD Liaison to OPAG)

2. Meeting called to order at 11:05am

- 2.1.1. Approval of minutes from August 31, 2005 OPAG meeting performed via e-mail to OPAG members

3. Old Business/ Standing Agenda Items

3.1. Retention pay (ORSP)/Loan Repayment

- 3.1.1. Nothing new to report. Optometrists still cannot receive loan repayment and ORSP concurrently.
- 3.1.2. CAPT Ketcher stated that the issue of optometry being the only discipline that cannot receive retention pay concurrent with loan repayment was forwarded to the HSO PAC Chairperson, CAPT Linda Morris Brown. CAPT Brown forwarded the information to OCCO, who mentioned the possibility of lowering the ORSP amounts to equal the ORSP amounts of other services. It has been brought to CAPT Ketcher's attention that other services have experienced a reduction in their ORSP amount and that the head of Air Force optometry wants pay parity for O.D. across the services, including USPHS. The Chiefs of the other services are planning a conference call to discuss the issue.
- 3.1.3. The other services are moving toward a civilian transformation of health care, which has caused the other services to experience overstaffing of O.D.s. CAPT Ketcher is arguing that USPHS ORSP should not be lowered because I.H.S. is understaffed.
- 3.1.4. ORSP renewal forms should have been received via e-mail from Alicia Welsh in the Compensation Branch. Depending on when you sent in your renewal, you should be receiving orders and the payment in one of your

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upcoming paychecks. Several OPAG members received the ORSP in their October 2005 pay on 11/01/2005.

3.1.5. For FY2005, there were 4 new I.H.S. loan repayment awards and 20 extensions.

3.1.5.1. There are currently 19 optometrists on the waiting list for LRP

3.2. Medical Benefits - nothing new to report. Tricare information is available on-line at www.tricare.osd.mil. TRICARE has many different e-newsletters you can subscribe to by visiting the website. The Fact Sheets subscription is useful to keep up with benefits changes.

3.3. Transformation – nothing new to report.

3.4. Pay - The new automated, online Payroll System is scheduled to go live for Active Duty Officers on March 31, 2006.

3.5. Uniform Policies – The BDU T-shirt for the Field Utility Uniform is available through Navy Nex. The PHS unit sleeve patch is not yet available. The flag patch is only for the Katrina deployment.

3.6. Retirement – tentative retirements

3.5.1. CAPT Hatch, mid-2006

3.5.2 CAPT Siu Wong, March 2006

3.5.3 CAPT John Garber, August 2006

3.5.4 CAPT James Hughes, August 2006

3.5.5 There have been instances of officers submitting PHS Forms 1373 (Separation of CO) through their supervisory channels to OCCO for processing. This can work well if the 30 day rule is not an issue. However, it causes delays in the effective date of separation if the 1373 arrives at OCCO without giving 30 days notice to OCCO (from last day at duty station).

Officers should fax a copy directly to OCCO, Assignments Division, Fax number 240 453 6030 and simultaneously forward a copy through their supervisory channels/Fiscal/Administrative Officer.

Prior to the electronic forms, we used to use the carbon copy 1373 where one of the 2 carbon copies went thru supervisory channels and the original copy went directly to OCCO (DCP).

Officers have always been encouraged to fax a copy directly to OCCO immediately after filling out Part A in order to meet the 30 day rule. This has not changed.

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3.6 OPAG Position Papers

- 3.6.2** A Loan Repayment Position Paper has been developed and forwarded to the Chief Professional Officer of the HSO PAC in hopes of more optometry loan repayment contracts being awarded in the future.

3.7 Selection of JOAG for OPAG

- 3.7.1** LCDR Gregory Flaitz was chosen and accepted the position of JOAG Liaison to the OPAG.

3.8 Title 38 – Civil Service Reclassification – Pay Issues

- 3.8.1** I.H.S. Headquarters is revisiting the request for an optometry special salary rate.
- 3.8.1.1** I.H.S. Headquarters is requesting more information in terms of national reports and corroborating salary reports.
- 3.8.2** Reclassification of positions to a higher grade doesn't appear to be likely in the near future.

4. New Business and Liaison Reports

4.1 OFRD Report – CDR Larry Zubel

- 4.1.1.** CDR Zubel has been working on ways to inform OFRD as to the services optometrists can provide in deployment situations.
- 4.1.2.** See section 5.4 of these minutes for more ORFD information

4.2 Eye Care Coordination Committee Report – CAPT Richard Hatch

- 4.2.1** The next meeting will be at the end of January in Phoenix. The committee will be examining contract health priorities for surgical services.
- 4.2.2** It appears certain now that the ophthalmologist that was scheduled to start at GIMC on 11/07/2005 will NOT be filling the position vacated by Dr. Frederiksen's retirement last June. Dr. Cox said he is going to call some other doctors from whom he has heard interest in IHS ophthalmology in the last year, but, we have no viable applicants at this time.

4.3 I.H.S. Optometry Clinical Consultant Report – CAPT Terry Schleisman

- 4.3.1** The IHS Optometry FY2005 Report and Budget was recently submitted to IHS Headquarters. This document contains the combined FY2005 year-end report for IHS Optometry, and it also contains the 2005 Budget Report and the 2006 Budget Request. It also contains a listing of the IHS

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Optometry Committees and Assignments, as well as Optometry Programs organized by each respective Area.

- 4.3.2 There were an increased number of vacancies in FY2005, with 20 vacancies reported. This is a vacancy rate of approximately 13%.
- 4.3.3 The average time to fill a vacancy is rising, with the average time to fill a vacancy in FY2005 at approximately 8 months.
- 4.3.4 The Kayenta residency position went unfilled this year.
- 4.3.5 There is a new residency position this year at Sacaton.
- 4.3.6 There were 138 rotations for clinical training at I.H.S. facilities during the 2004-2005 school year.
- 4.3.7 A PowerPoint presentation is being prepared for use at optometry schools for recruitment for the residency program, clinical externships, and to advertise I.H.S. as a career opportunity.

4.4 COA Liaison Report – CDR Dawn Clary

- 4.4.1 New toll free number for COA 1-866-366-9593
- 4.4.2 Optometry has requested a Break-out Session for Tuesday, May 2nd during Category Day for the 2006 COA Conference. Topics and suggested speakers will be needed. This is a half-day event. There is a small amount of money available for speaker travel, but if the speaker is local, even better.
- 4.4.3 COA Foundation accepting donations to assist Corps hurricane victims. Some of our officers have lost their homes and all their possessions due to Katrina and Rita, and to assist these officers, donations are being accepted. Contributions can be sent to the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation, 8201 Corporate Drive, Suite 200, Landover, MD 20785 and marked “Hurricane Relief”.
- 4.4.4 Commissioned Corps deploys in response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Over 1,000 officers have been deployed as a result of the public health emergencies declared along the Gulf Coast. From all reports, the Corps’ actions have gained the respect and admiration of Secretary Leavitt. He has called the Corps his “strong right arm” and “Rock of Gibraltar.”

COA has expressed its hope that the ad hoc measures and procedures developed to respond to Katrina and Rita will be quickly institutionalized. The Association has also recommended that OPHEP be merged within OSG/OFRD.

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Not all aspects of the Corps' deployments went without problems. Continuing issues include prompt delivery of travel orders, officers being deployed to areas without need, etc.

- 4.4.5 COA has suggested that now is the time for the Secretary to act on the transformation decision options resulting from last year's Lewin Group study and report.

4.5 JOAG Liaison Report – LCDR Greg Flaitz

- 4.5.1 Nothing to report this month. The last JOAG meeting pertained to some housekeeping items and getting things ready for the New Year.

4.6 AFOS Liaison Report – CDR Keith Cespon

- 4.6.1 CDR Cespon was present at the AOA convention at the House of Delegates meeting as a representative for AFOS
 - 4.6.1.1 Unanimous approval of \$60 per member rolling dues assessment for the following:
 - 4.6.1.1.1 Program to provide a funding program (in form of no-interest loans) to states facing opposition for legislation involving the protection of the profession or practice of optometry.
 - 4.6.1.1.2 Large public awareness campaign for optometry and to counter misleading messages by organized ophthalmology.
 - 4.6.1.2 Unified membership approved – all state affiliates, including AFOS, will require their members to be members of AOA. There may be some grandfathering for current AFOS members who are not AOA members, but all future members will be required to join and pay dues to AOA.
- 4.6.2 An important highlight: *AOA has been working towards restoring optometry into the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Student Loan Repayment Program.* This program can provide repayments of up to \$50,000 for a 2 year commitment to service (as Commissioned Officers) at underserved areas. The nhsc.bhpr.hrsa.gov website has details on the program. While the program does not guarantee loan awards (similar to the Indian Health Service LRP, if optometry does gain inclusion, it will offer additional recruitment opportunities. The **AOA Annual Report 2004-2005** is available on line @ www.aoanews.org, on right side of page click on details for 2004-2005 AOA Annual Report.
- 4.6.3 LCDR Michael Davis will be reviewing and evaluating abstracts for the AFOS newsletter.

4.7 AMSUS Liaison Report – CAPT Clifford Brown

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4.7.1 The annual AMSUS meeting is scheduled to begin on Monday, 31 Oct 2005, and the annual presentation of the Biological, Chemical, and Nuclear Warfare Course occurs on the immediately preceding days of the 29th and 30th at the same location. This course is offered free of charge to all registered AMSUS attendees; for non-AMSUS attendees, the charge is several hundred dollars. As foreign as the disaster response actions are to those of us who were deployed to them, this course may prove useful in the future. The convention is offered this year at the Opryland Convention Center in Nashville, TN.

4.7.2 A wide variety of course work is available to attendees in addition to the Air Guard offerings of "pure" or traditional optometric study. Much of the value-added gain is from the contact which occurs with other Corps officers from other disciplines. This includes face-to-face contact with ADM Carmona and many others of significant leadership responsibility and position.

4.8 PHS HSO PAC Recruitment and Placement Sub-Committee Liaison– CDR David Bellware

4.8.1 Nothing new to report regarding recruiting/placement liaison activities. There is currently one applicant who is at an IHS site working as a contractor while awaiting a background check clearance for USPHS, One applicant who is a scholarship recipient/payback -- interviewing with IHS sites, and one applicant who is looking into changing from CS to CC.

4.9 FDA Optometrist Report

4.9.1 CDR Kim Lewandowski-Walker is scheduled to teach a course for FDA investigators on ophthalmic devices at the FDA's Basic Medical Device course November 28 through December 9, 2005 in Washington, D.C.

4.9.2 CAPT James Saviola, Division of Ophthalmic and Ear, Nose and Throat Devices gave the following report via e-mail:

4.9.2.1 Both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives have passed legislation that amends the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act to deem all contact lenses to be medical devices. The bill, S. 172, will now be presented to President George W. Bush to be signed into law. This is the second time in as many years that the House has passed the legislation. In 2004, the issue was not voted on by the Senate. In April 2003, the FDA issued guidance for sampling detention of decorative plano contact lenses in the Federal Register that stated decorative contact lenses should be regulated as cosmetic articles, provided they were not marketed with any device related claim. When this measure is signed into law, FDA will again regulate decorative plano lenses as medical devices as directed by this act of Congress.

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4.9.3 CAPT Debra Lewis, Office of Orphan Products Development, gave the following report via e-mail:

4.9.3.1 Our program just provided \$14.3 million in grant funding for clinical studies to advance promising products for Orphan diseases. We will do so again this year. My reason for noting this is that I'd like to see more applications for ophthalmic products.... so if optometrists know of clinical researchers working on products for a rare disease, please suggest they contact us by calling 301 827-3666 or looking at our website www.fda.gov/orphan. An orphan disease affects fewer than 200,000 persons in the U.S. generally would not have commercial interest. By providing a variety of incentives, we are able to interest institutions in studying these products and we get more safe and effective products to the market for Americans with rare diseases e.g. forms of retinitis pigmentosa.

4.10 Academy Fellowship

4.10.1 Required for Non-Physician Board Certification for optometry

4.10.2 OPAG members were aware of three PHS candidates for Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry and three PHS candidates for Diplomate in the American Academy of Optometry.

5. Career Development/Promotions/Awards

5.1 Billets

5.1.1 Nothing to report. Issue is on hold at headquarters and OCCO until the Corps transformation.

5.1.2 The billet issue did receive some renewed interest at the category level after the comments from the 2005 HSO promotion board indicated that optometrists appeared to have more responsibility than their billets indicated.

5.1.3 CAPT Schleisman stated he would try to get an update on this issue.

5.2 Promotions

5.2.1 Permanent promotions have not been announced

5.2.2 The 2005 competitive permanent grade promotion process is currently being finalized. Officers who were reviewed for a competitive permanent grade promotion in 2005, will not be promoted unless the Medical Affairs Branch has on file a current "Report of Medical History" (including a signed "Disclosure Statement"), within 1 year prior to the expected permanent promotion effective date AND a current physical

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examination (within the last 5 years). Officers, who are NOT within medical compliance at the time these files are checked, will be DENIED permanent promotion for the 2005 Promotion year cycle. See the following website if you need forms:

<http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/eforms/dd2807-1.pdf>

5.3 Awards

5.3.1 The OPAG awards for Commissioned Officer Optometrists of the Year and Civil Service/Direct Hire Optometrist of the Year have been named and developed. Submission deadlines: 12/31/05. OPAG will decide by February 1, 2006.

5.3.1.1 The Lester Caplan Award is to recognize a PHS tribal direct hire or PHS civil service optometrist who has demonstrated exemplary work as evidenced by a specific accomplishment(s) toward the mission of the PHS. This award may be presented annually by the Optometry Professional Advisory Group (OPAG).

5.3.1.2 The Edward Hamilton Award is presented to a career USPHS Optometry Commissioned Officer who is recognized by his/her peers for outstanding work as evidenced by a specific accomplishment(s) toward the mission of the PHS. This award may be presented annually by the Optometry Professional Advisory Group (OPAG).

5.3.1.3 See CDR Palma for details and award nomination forms.

5.3.2 The Health Service Professional Advisory is seeking nominations for the “Health Services Responder of the Year” Award. It will be presented at the Category Day luncheon on May 2, 2006 in Denver, Colorado by the Surgeon General. Nominations may come from a supervisor, professional colleague or anyone who, through a professional working relationship, can attest to the impact of the nominee’s contributions. Self-nominations will **NOT** be accepted and current HS-PAC members are **NOT** eligible for this award. The HSO selected will also be submitted to OFRD for consideration for the PHS Responder of the Year Award. Please send nomination electronically to **BOTH LCDR Frances Placide (Frances.Placide@ihs.gov) and CDR Elise Young (EYoung@hrs.gov)**. See the HSO PAC website for more details.

5.3.3 The deadline for the AFOS Junior and OD of the year awards is approaching very soon. (Note: AFOS is extending the deadline this year to 30 November.). See CDR Cespon or CDR Palma for details.

5.3.4 Please remember to acknowledge the accomplishments of your fellow officers and become involve in your local awards authority.

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5.4 Readiness/ORFD

- 5.4.1** Any officers not meeting readiness who require assistance should contact CDR Zubel.
- 5.4.2** There were several optometrists who deployed for the recent hurricanes. To OPAG's knowledge, none of the optometrists deployed in a clinical role. CDR Palma stated that other providers, such as urologists and pediatricians, were also deployed in roles other than clinical.
- 5.4.3** CDR Zubel stated that O.D.s and students from Houston volunteered their skills to help the evacuees. Lack of sanitation and quick evacuations caused many evacuees to develop eye infections, experience contact lens over wear, or forget/lose their glasses. After mental health, optometric services were the second most highly requested service from the evacuees. Lenscrafters and Wal-Mart set up mobile surfacing labs to help fill the refractive prescriptions written.
- 5.4.4** CDR Zubel will work with ORFD and ask CDR Clary, HS Representative to the COA Board of Directors, if COA can help promote the need for the optometry deployment role to ORFD.
- 5.4.5** Commissioned Corps Personnel Policy Memorandum (PPM) 06-001 Revised Influenza Vaccination Policy for Basic Level of Force Readiness and Promotion Year 2006 states that the influenza vaccine waiver expires December 31, 2005. You must provide proof of influenza vaccine to MAB and update your vaccination information in your officer summary page of the OFRD website to avoid losing basic readiness.
- 5.4.6** CAPT Mc Sherry alluded that a reproof letter may be placed in the OPF of those officers not meeting basic readiness by November 30, 2005. Failure to meet basic readiness by a second target date (to be determined) may result in a letter of reprimand that will stay in your OPF for 2 years and may result in the loss of special pays, removal from promotion lists, and removal from assimilation lists.

5.5 Assimilation

- 5.5.1** Assimilation year 2004, the list of nominees has been prepared and is awaiting nomination by the President and the confirmation by the Senate.
- 5.5.2** Board review for Assimilation year 2005 is complete. Success rates are being determined. When success rates are approved, successful officers will undergo an administrative review (current with certification/licensure, COER's, basic readiness, NACI security clearance and adverse actions resolved). Once complete all officers will be notified of their disposition.

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5.5.3 The deadline for Assimilation year 2006 is February 15, 2006. Applications are available on the CCMIS website under official forms (PHS form 7034). Examples of officer statements can be obtained by contacting your agency liaison or by request to the assimilation coordinator, Camille.hawkins@hhs.gov.

5.6 Pay - The proposed 2006 military pay rates are available at <http://www.military.com/Resources/>

5.7 Positions

5.7.1 CAPT Ron Sellers is transferring from Zuni to Lawton on/about January 01, 2006.

5.7.2 Dr. Ray Meada transferred from Gila River to Sacaton

5.7.3 Dr. Anthony Stout (2004-2005 resident at GIMC) accepted a position at Albuquerque Indian Hospital.

5.7.4 Dr. Richard Hart accepted a position at Sitka, AK.

5.7.5 Dr. Stacy Holdsworth accepted a position at Gila River.

5.7.6 Dr. Henry Wirth has been contracting in a small clinic in the northern Albuquerque Area and stated he will be retiring so there is a new position available at Dulce, NM.

5.7.7 Dr. Patrick Britton accepted a position at Rapid City, SD

5.7.8 Dr. Jacqueline Jones accepted a position at Bethel, AK.

5.7.9 The most recent Recruitment Announcement can be found on the IHS Optometry Website at www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/Optomtery/Optjobs.cfm. The sites that have been filled and taken off of the list are Sitka, Lawton, Rapid City and Bethel. The sites that have been added are Dulce, NM, Zuni, NM and San Jacinto, CA.

5.7.10 CAPT Ketcher asked David S. Danielson, Deputy Director, Government Affairs, American Optometric Association, about his perspectives on the lack of O.D.s at NIH and NEI. Dr. Danielson responded that optometry is represented (and has had a seat for years) on the NEI Advisory Council. Also, the AOA has had a long term, positive association with the NEI staff.

That there are no ODs on NIH staff (and in HHS headquarters) is a chronic issue the AOA has struggled with for years. Dr. Danielson stated that the AOA continues to troll for ODs who are interested in pursuing administrative posts in the federal agencies, with mixed results. One

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positive report is that an OD was hired by the CDC (in Atlanta) last year in an administrative post.

6 Communications

6.1 The Optometry Web Board has been developed. The address is <http://www.forum.ihs.gov/~optometry>. This Web Board will be used to post announcements regarding I.H.S./P.H.S. optometry.

6.2 CAPT Ketcher reported that the OPAG has a web page on the HSO PAC website. Contact CAPT Ketcher if you wish to put information on the OPAG web page, such as awards, meeting minutes, etc.

7 Meetings and Recruitment Activities

7.1 AMSUS – October 30 – November 04, 2005 – Nashville, TN. CAPT Clifford Brown is planning to attend. AMSUS offers a Biological, Chemical, and Nuclear warfare course, which may be useful in deployment situations. The Air National Guard typically provides the optometry CE for the AMSUS meeting, but may discontinue this in the future.

7.2 FSO – PHS may be requested to sponsor the FSO meeting in 2009. The meeting hotel is the Doubletree. Room rate is \$95.00/night. Call 1-800-222-8733 to reserve a room. <http://afos2020.org/Meetings/Fso/fso.htm>

7.3 AAO Annual Meeting – December 08 – 11, 2005 – San Diego, CA. Information can be found at www.aaopt.org

7.4 SECO/AFOS - February 24-26, 2006; Georgia World Congress Center and Omni Hotel Atlanta, Georgia. Information can be found at www.secointernational.com
CAPT Ketcher is planning to attend.

7.5 COA – next meeting - 2006 Conference Planning is Underway. USPHS Conference in Denver, CO. First week of May, 2006 Theme: Crisis Response

7.6 IHS Eye Care Biennial 2006 Meeting – The next meeting is scheduled May 8-12, 2006 at the Southern California College of Optometry Fullerton campus. CAPT John Garber will again organize and conduct the continuing education program. The meeting is open to all I.H.S and PHS optometrists. Contact Ms. Sue Atkinson at SCCO for registration information or CAPT Hatch if you need the registration form.

7.7 AOA Convention - Next AOA – June 21-25, 2006 – Las Vegas, Nevada. Information is available at www.aoa.org

7.8 BOTC – Upcoming events

December 6th – 8th White River, AZ Contact: CAPT Jan Frederick

December 13th – 15th Oklahoma City Contact: CAPT Marty Oberly

January 9th – 13th ** Anchorage, AK Contact: CAPT Michael Keiffer

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February 6th – 18th Rockville, MD Contact: COTA in OCCO

March 6th – 10th ** Farmington, NM Contact: CAPT John Fugate

April 28th – 30th COA Contact: COA

May 5th – May 7th COA Contact: COA

July 29th – August 2nd ** Minneapolis, MN Contact: LCDR Ron Keats

8 Action Items

8.1 CAPT Wong will be invited to the next OPAG meeting to give a presentation on the American Public Health Association and Beta Sigma Kappa.

8.2 CAPT Schleisman will continue to investigate the billet issue.

8.3 OPAG will continue to look into the civil service special salary rate issue.

9 OPAG Meetings

9.1 Next meeting scheduled for January 04, 2006 at 11:00 CST.

9.1.1 CAPT Richard Hatch, CAPT Terry Schleisman, and CAPT Wong will be invited as guests at the next meeting.

9.1.2 OPAG liaisons should submit their activity reports to CAPT Ketcher by close of business January 2, 2006 so they can be shared with the OPAG members.

9.1.3 OPAG members should use the same conference call number and password

9.1.4 Meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm

Minutes prepared by CDR Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker, FDA Representative to the OPAG

Distribution: HSO CPO, HSO PAC, PHS Optometrists