

## WOLD SAFE FUND TRAVEL GRANTS • BY MARIE BODACK, OD, FAAO, FCOVD

COVD Annual Meeting Travel Grants are funded using the interest earned in the COVD Wold SAFE Fund and also by some direct donations from members. These grants help students and residents offset the cost of attending the annual meeting. In 2008, COVD offered 42 Wold SAFE Fund Travel Grants of \$200 each to students and residents who applied.

The students and residents were required to write an essay explaining their interest in developmental vision. In many cases, students credited a certain doctor with instilling in them an interest in vision therapy, showing how influential a doctor can be in motivating others. Below are comments from the grant application essays:

“At the COVD conference last year I was able to meet Dr. Philip Bugaiski who has a vision therapy office in Charlotte, NC. After visiting his office, I was so inspired by the wall of letters that had been written by his patients or the parents of his patients, thanking Dr.

Bugaiski and his staff for their work.”  
*Sheena Jessee, Nova '10*

“During my junior year of college, I walked into Family Optometry in Arizona, where Drs. Rob Lewis, Howard Bacon, Kerry Carr, and Stacie Eskew practice behavioral optometry. I shadowed the doctors and vision therapists and fell in love with the work they do.” *Suzanne Tsang, Pacific '10*

“Dr. Patrick Pirote has been a wonderful mentor this summer and really taught me some key elements in running a very successful vision therapy practice and primary care practice.”  
*Erin Weston, SCO, '09*

“I had never heard the term ‘vision therapy’ before observing it firsthand in Dr. Naomi Barnes’ office in Whitefish, MT... I was offered a position as a vision therapist and it was so rewarding to see changes in a child’s confidence level and hear how proud parents were of their child’s progress.” *Paula Handford, OD, Resident, Pacific*

“I became interested in behavioral/developmental vision care shortly after shadowing a behavioral optometrist, Dr. Carl Hillier, in Lemon Grove, CA.”  
*Thuy Ngo, SCO, '10*

You too can make a difference in a student’s life and open their eyes to optometric vision therapy. If you aren’t already donating to the SAFE Fund, please do. If you attend the annual meeting, be sure to come to the student/doctor mixer; it’s a great opportunity for students to talk directly with behavioral/developmental optometrists. If you would like to mentor a student or open your practice to student visits, please contact:

Radhika Chawla, OD at  
rchawla@sympatico.ca or  
Kimberly Walker, OD at  
kimreneewalker@msn.com

*Dr. Bodack is Chair of the COVD Academic Services Committee, staff optometrist at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, and a faculty member at the University of Cincinnati School of Medicine.*

## ANSWERING QUESTIONS • BY TONI BRISTOL

On the COVD website we have a video of an interview with Dr. Mitchell Scheiman, principal investigator for the Convergence Insufficiency Treatment Trial. Due to the fact that the treatment trial included ophthalmology as well as optometry, one of the recommendations he makes is for parents to call their eye doctor’s office and ask if they have an in-office vision therapy program. If someone called your office to ask that question, what would your staff say?

Have you ever wondered if your phones are being answered correctly? If you are like most offices, you have given your staff a script of some sort and you trust that they follow it. Yet, what information have you given them about vision therapy? Do they just refer any VT-related calls to you or your therapist or are they confident in handling these types of calls on their own?

Periodically, I recommend you have someone call, pretending to be a patient calling in, to see if your calls are being

handled per your instructions. If not, you can take this as an opportunity to educate your staff on what is needed.

If you haven’t given your staff specific instructions on how to handle VT-related calls, or if it has been awhile since you have discussed this with your staff, please make this the topic of your next staff meeting. In the meeting you should:

1. Ask them what types of questions they are currently getting from callers and how they are answering them.
2. Find out what questions they have about vision therapy.
3. Review how you would like to have the different types of calls handled.
4. Find out how they would answer the question, “What is a Behavioral or Developmental Optometrist?”
5. Ask them what COVD is and if they have been to the website.
6. Educate them appropriately based on their responses.

It would also be good to review what OEPF and PAVE are as well. This is especially wise if you have any of their pamphlets in your office.

Even if you are personally speaking with every patient that calls in with VT-related questions, you should still ensure your staff knows how to answer these types of questions. They don’t need to know everything; just enough to gather the right information from the caller, to assure them they have called the right place and assist the patient in scheduling their appointment. Remember, if a patient doesn’t get the appropriate answer, once they hang up it is very hard to get that moment back. Make sure you take the time to empower your staff to answer caller’s questions correctly. It could make all the difference!

*Toni Bristol is an Affiliate Member of COVD and a Practice Management Consultant in Montrose, California and can be reached by email at tonibristol@expansionconsultants.com*