





Pioneering Orthoptic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

IPOSC
International Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus Council

Dr. Jan Roelof Polling, IOA President

IOA
INTERNATIONAL ORTHOPTIC ASSOCIATION



Dr. Marylin Miller in Africa

Addressing Challenges in Pediatric Eye Care in Developing Nations





Starting the Gambia project

- 2019: Dr. Miller proposes building the orthoptic profession in sub-Saharan Africa
- 2021: IPOSC creates the International Pediatric Eyecare Training (IPET) committee, partners with IOA





International Pediatric Eyecare Training Committee (IPET)



Dr. Steve Christiansen

- Training a Zimbabwean surgeon for cataract surgery (1993–2023)
- Establishing a comprehensive eye care program in Lesotho and developing a curriculum for eye-care nurses
- Collaborating with Rwanda's Ministry of Health to create a hospital-based eye care system



Cindy Pritchard

- Establishing IOA programs to deliver expertise globally, benefiting countries like Malaysia, Pakistan, and China
- Innovating orthoptic education and certification, training professionals worldwide
- Chair of the IOA International Cooperation Program

Considerations for site selection



Need for pediatric eye care recognized by the site and the government

- Only one permanent ophthalmologist in the Gambia in 2022
- Population of 2.6 million, with 49.4% of the population are aged 0-17 years



Infrastructure

- OneSight created optical labs and outreach clinics, provides pediatric frames
- University of Vermont Medical Center: national vision screening system in The Gambia

Sustainability

- The Sheikh Zayed Regional Eye Care Centre (SZRECC) already has ophthalmic training programs:
  - Regional Ophthalmic Training Program ROTP
- Draws students from many African countries
- Ministry of Health must recognize and support the orthoptic profession





Steve and SZRECC's CEO Dr. Abba Hydara



January 2022: Initial site visit

Setting up the Gambia project

- January 2022: IPET selects The Sheikh Zayed Regional Eye Care Centre (SZRECC) in Gambia as site for pilot orthoptic training program

IPET program outline

Entry to the course:

ROTP degree in optometry or surgical nurse

Training program span 9 months, including theoretical and practical components

3-4 students per cohort, including local and international trainees

IOA teaching volunteers

Periodic reviews to assess progress and address challenges

Exam by pediatric ophthalmologist and orthoptists

Written, oral and practical part

6 months internship to conclude their degree

Graduates transition to teaching roles within 2 years

Oversight managed by IPET with annual audits and curriculum updates



Orthoptic training program in Gambia 2022



October 2022:

- First class begins
- The students were specially selected to become the future instructors

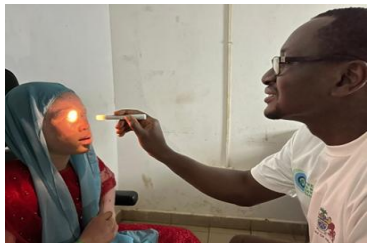


September 2022: Planning meeting







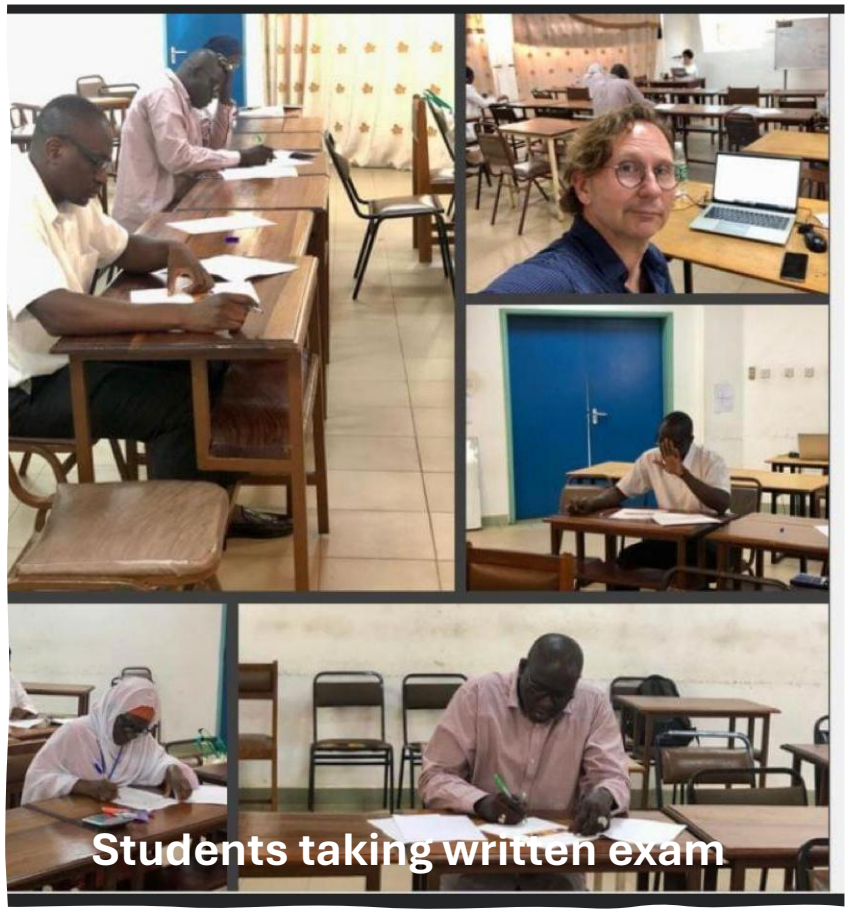








Students in training with volunteer


Students taking written exam


Graduation ceremony

Orthoptic training program in Gambia 2022-24

- July 2023: First class graduates
- Passed their written, oral and practical exams modelled after the AOC and COC exams
- Monte Del Monte, MD and JR Polling, IOA President, served as oral/practical examiners

Orthoptic training program in Gambia 2023





October 2023:

- Second class begins
- Graduates from first class are in 6 months internship and are being mentored to become the future instructors.



Orthoptic training program in The Gambia 2024

October 2024:

- Third class begins with first foreign enrollee (Cameroon)







Celebrating excellence

Sutay Jobe



- 2023 Graduate
- Recipient of the IOA Education Award
- Recognized for outstanding academic performance and dedication to advancing eye care in the region

Dodou Jagne



- 2024 Graduate
- Awarded a HOYA Scholarship
- Enrolled in the Online European Diploma for Orthoptists

Impactful initiatives



Outreach Clinics:

- Fully trained orthoptic staff manage 11 rural clinics in The Gambia
- Clinics provide essential eye care for the poorest and most vulnerable
- Hundreds of children and adults, previously unable to access care, now receive treatment for conditions like amblyopia, refractive errors, and strabismus.
- The clinics also identify serious underlying medical conditions, such as congenital cataracts, retinoblastoma and myasthenia gravis, ensuring timely referrals for treatment



Leadership development

- Graduates from the program now hold key leadership roles at SZRECC, solidifying the program's long-term impact:



- **Haddy Sohna** is preparing to become the new Head of the ROTP program



- **Alagie Sayang** serves as the Clinic Manager, overseeing operations and service delivery



- **Sutay Jobe** runs the Optical Lab while contributing as a skilled orthoptist

- With graduates in influential positions, the program continues to grow and expand its reach

Donors

- The German Committee for the Prevention of Blindness
- Anonymous patient of Dr. Mohamad Jaafar
- Eyerising International
- Stiftung Augenlicht Foundation
- IOA
- Individuals via the IPOSC website



Equipment Donations

- **Good-Lite Company**
- See Worthy
- Acuvue
- Fresnel Prism and Lens Company
- AACO (textbooks)
- Individuals via Veronica Picard (among other equipment, a much-needed tonometer and portable indirect ophthalmoscope)









Karen McMain



Volunteer Teaching Orthoptists

- Lillian Aladejebi (Canada)
- Lieke Gouma (Netherlands)
- Anna Horwood (United Kingdom)
- Jorie Jackson (USA)
- Rachael Jenkins (USA)
- Shelley Klein (USA)
- Leann Luciuk (Canada)
- Karen McMain (Canada)
- Rowena McNamara (United Kingdom)
- Veronica Picard (USA)
- Isabel Reich-d'Almeida (Portugal)
- Jan-Roelof Polling (Netherlands)
- Lisa Rovick (USA)
- Aqsa Saleem (Canada)
- Jocelyn Zurevinsky (Canada)







Sustainable pediatric eye care in The Gambia

- **Recognition and collaboration**
  - Profession recognized by The Gambia's Ministry of Health
- **Innovative training and practices**
  - Adaptive curriculum includes tools like I-care/Tonopen for pressure checks and training in fundus screening
  - New policy ensures prescribing corrective lenses for children as young as 18 months
- **Outreach and sustainability**
  - Agreement to station orthoptists in rural clinics
  - Graduates mentored into leadership roles, creating a self-sustaining program with reduced volunteer dependency
- **Impact and reach**
  - Preventable blindness reduced through early interventions and follow-ups for amblyopia and glaucoma
  - Increased patient volume, with regional patients traveling from Senegal to access care



How you can help!



- **Support our mission**:
  - Fund scholarships
  - **Fund instructor training**
  - Fund medical equipment
- Ensure sustainable, life-changing care for children in Africa
- **Every contribution counts!**
- **How to donate**:
  - Contact us: volunteers@internationalorthoptics.org

Join us in transforming pediatric eye care in Africa

Thank you!



Our sponsors

IPOSC Leadership

Steve Christiansen, Cindy Pritchard, Karen McMain and the entire IPET Committee

Gambian students

SZRECC Leadership

Gambia’s Ministry of Health