

Analysis of Canadian Ophthalmological Society 2013 Membership Survey Results

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Overview

This document reviews the results of the Canadian Ophthalmological Society's 2013 membership survey with a view to implications for COS communications and advocacy as the Society develops its next strategic plan.

Main Findings

- Advocacy is not the primary reason most COS members belong to the Society. In fact, it ranks lowest (38.9%) among the options provided, below the annual scientific meeting (70.1%), continuing professional development activities (65.2%), loyalty (53.4%), *CJO* (50.4%), networking (44.7%) and clinical practice guidelines (40.2%). This number has remained fairly stable since the last survey in 2010 when 35% of respondents listed advocacy as their primary reason for membership.
- At the same time, when asked to indicate the importance of various COS programs and services, 68.1% of COS members say advocacy is "very important" or "important." Advocacy is rated lower than CPD (83.2%) and the annual scientific meeting (80.8%), but in the same range as CPGs (71.8%) and *CJO* (67.7%), and far higher than the members' newsletter (38.6%) and COS website (47.5%). Again, this is comparable to the results of the 2010 member survey when 64% of respondents rated advocacy "very important" or "important."
- Very few members feel advocacy is something the COS should stop doing (2.0%), however it is worth noting that almost one-in-ten respondents believe COS should stop publishing a member newsletter (9.4%). When considered alongside the results of the previous questions which show that 15.9% of members say the newsletter is either "unimportant" or "very unimportant," this should prompt some reflection regarding the newsletter (see 'analysis' below).
- When asked to indicate items the COS should start doing, "Take a more active role in government advocacy" ranks second of four options (50.0%), behind "Be involved in developing online CPD for credit" (59.4%) but ahead of "Provide website development support to

- specialty societies” (28.3%) and “Collect membership fees for subspecialty societies” (16%).
- Roughly half of respondents (54.1%) were aware that COS updated its website in 2012. Suggestions for improving the website include listing job postings and research opportunities as well as providing more online educational content – a direction already being pursued.
 - When asked to rank their top three advocacy priorities, members favoured “support for quality patient care” (55% of respondents, with 28% naming it their top priority), “health human resources” (46.7% of respondents, with 16.8% naming it their top priority), “scopes of practice/collaborative care” (41.8% of respondents, with 15.6% naming it their top priority), “efficiency and system sustainability” (35.7% of respondents, with 7.4% naming it their top priority), “timely access to care” (35.6% of respondents, with 9.8% naming it their top priority) and “uninsured services” (25% of respondents, with 4.9% naming it their top priority). It is worth noting that four respondents (1.6%) indicated “other” and provided responses that point to concerns with optometry’s scopes of practice and another four (1.6%) provided responses that point to employment/HHR concerns.
 - If COS was to undertake an advocacy campaign on their priority issues, 49.6% of respondents indicated they would participate.
 - Roughly one-in-three respondents (34.4%) was aware of COS’ successful campaign to have cosmetic contact lenses classed as medical devices. This points to an opportunity to continue to highlight this advocacy ‘win’ in member communications.
 - Email and listserv are the preferred means of communication for members (78.3%), with membership letters coming a distant second (25%) and social media rounding out the list (3.7%). In terms of electronic communications, members prefer to receive monthly dispatches (48.4%), although roughly one-in-four members think quarterly is fine (25.8%).

Analysis

- Advocacy may not be the primary reason ophthalmologists and ophthalmology residents join the COS, however a majority of members believe it is an important activity and half of respondents would like COS to do more government advocacy. There is clearly a significant plurality and perhaps even a majority of COS members who would like the Society to be more active on the advocacy front. It is unclear whether these members are aware of all of COS’ advocacy efforts, but at the same time, this points to the need to communicate COS advocacy

more effectively to members and/or engage in more advocacy on member priorities.

- Member priorities for enhanced COS advocacy include quality care, health human resources and scopes of practice/collaborative care. COS' efforts over the summer of 2013 in supporting eye health councils and opposing the inappropriate expansion in optometrists' scopes of practice touch on all three member priorities. The relatively low score for "timely access to care" could prompt some reflection regarding COS' participation in the Wait Time Alliance, however it is possible that the WTA provides good advocacy results for very little cost (both in terms of staff time and financial costs). It is also worth considering whether governments would maintain their wait time efforts in the absence of WTA pressure. With 4 provinces receiving 'C' grades for sight restoration in the 2013 WTA Report Card, further government effort is clearly required.
- Roughly half of all members surveyed would participate in a COS advocacy campaign on one of their priority issues. If resources permit, COS should explore launching an advocacy campaign on a priority issue that includes significant opportunities for average members to participate. These grassroots campaigns often include teleconference or webinar briefings for members, with various other tools such as letter/email templates, petitions and other ways for members to participate. Lobby days, which consist of accompanying a team of members to Parliament or a provincial legislature (depending on the issue) are another high-profile, but relatively expensive way of engaging members in advocacy. As with the campaign in the summer of 2013, one of the benefits of grassroots advocacy is the member engagement it engenders.
- Member opinions of the value of the newsletter should be further explored. It is possible that many organizations would have similar results if they surveyed their members about the value of their newsletters. Are members able to opt-out of receiving the newsletter? How many have done so? If the number is roughly one-in-ten, then the survey is picking up on a group that has already opted out of the newsletter. Are statistics on newsletter 'opens' and 'click-throughs' being kept? What do they indicate? Newsletters remain an important tool for communicating with Society membership, but there may be an opportunity to improve the COS newsletter so that it better meets the needs of certain members. How often do members receive COS electronic communications? The ideal would seem to be monthly and possibly even quarterly during slow times (perhaps over the summer). This issue could be discussed at the Board and/or Councils. Likewise,

- COS could take suggestions on improving the newsletter at the annual meeting.
- Although membership surveys are primarily a tool for gauging member opinions, they are also useful communications vehicles. Questions 6 and 10 dealing with awareness of COS' new website and awareness of COS' campaign against cosmetic contact lenses serve this dual function of surveying members while also informing them of COS' work on their behalf. Simply put, there are 112 more members who are aware of the new website after completing the survey than there were before and, likewise, there are 160 more members who are now aware of COS' advocacy on cosmetic contact lenses. In an association of approximately 1100 members, driving awareness of this work by 10 – 15% is significant.
 - Beyond any specific knowledge COS gains about its members' opinions through the membership survey, there are significant benefits to having 244 members feel their views are being heard by their association. The survey should be repeated at an appropriate time, perhaps feeding into the next strategic planning exercise.