THE OPTOMETRIST
An essential part of the eye care system in Haiti.

WHAT IS OPTOMETRY?
Optometry is practiced in many countries across the world. Generally, optometrists are trained as primary healthcare practitioners of the eye, providing comprehensive vision care including refraction and the dispensing of spectacles and the detection, management and rehabilitation of conditions of the eye. Examples of the services optometrists provide include eye examinations, management of eye disease, and binocular vision disorders, low vision therapy, occupational vision care and referrals to ophthalmologists where required.

WHY OPTOMETRY FOR HAITI?
There are an estimated 10 million people in Haiti, and only 3 optometrists and 56 ophthalmologists to meet the eye care needs of the population. This inequity of eye care demands the development of optometry as a much needed progression within the health care system in Haiti.¹

Haiti has the highest levels of blindness and moderate and severe vision impairment among people aged 50 and over in the entire LAC region, with the age-standardised prevalence estimated at 4.8% and 21.9% respectively. This is three times greater than some other countries in the region.²

Historically, ophthalmologists, aided by available health care professionals, have addressed the refractive error needs of the country. However, the overall eye health demand has seen these dedicated professionals unable to adequately address the increasingly need of people requiring services, especially with regard to eliminating avoidable blindness due to refractive error.

REFERENCES
1. http://atlas.iapb.org/
HOW OPTOMETRY WILL BENEFIT HAITI

The development of qualified optometrists will make an exceptional contribution to the vision care needs of Haiti. Optometrists will relieve ophthalmologists from the management of basic and common eye conditions, allowing them to focus on their areas of specialty – medical and surgical treatment. The creation of skilled optometrists will in time increase the efficiency of eye care services in Haiti and improve the health system’s cost-effectiveness.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

The World Health Organization recommends a minimum of one optometrist per 50,000 people by the year 2020. There are currently only three optometrists in Haiti serving a population of 10 million. As we look to the future for Haitian eye health, in our collective quest for excellence in vision care for all, we congratulate the first students who will enrol in the program - the pioneers of Haitian optometry. We envisage a future for Haitian eye care that encapsulates perfectly our ethos of Vision for everyone ... everywhere.

Uncorrected refractive error is the leading cause of moderate and severe vision impairment in the LAC region (including Haiti)²

In the combined Latin America and Caribbean region (including Haiti) have moderate and severe vision impairment ²

14 million people

“I feel really encouraged about optometry being a new profession in Kenya and being part of that. I work as a Clinical Instructor, as junior faculty for the department of Optometry and Vision Science at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST). My experience as a lecturer is great. I am challenged every day and thus the need to increase my knowledge is inevitable – that is why I am currently taking my masters in optometry at MMUST and thereafter will pursue a doctorate degree. I am committed helping establish this profession for my country.”

Sheilah, first generation optometrist, KENYA