The benefits of early, direct exposure to patient care has become an important aspect of the medical education model over the past decade. Authentic interaction with patients helps interns in developing efficient clinical skills, as well as ease anxieties in patient communication. The School of Optometry jointly organized a cross-cultural experience with a service-learning centered global youth leadership program to provide community vision screenings for an overseas community in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan.

**INTERVENTION**

The theme we explored is whether an early engagement of optometry students in vision screenings helped enhanced their perceived readiness of clinical and generic skills. We implemented a mixed model where optometry students assisted in vision and eye care delivery alongside a group of general undergraduate students who served as layman helpers as well as local translators with different majors from various interdisciplinary departments. This model studied the perceived values of early initiation in community services to enhance future clinical skills. We evaluated its impact by using voluntary-based reflective journals for students to express their perception of generic competency and clinical readiness.

**OBSERVATION**

Of the 10 junior optometry students who participated in the vision screening, 5 responded to the reflective journal submission. The respondents who replied reported that vision screening was very beneficial in cultivating communication skills, making learning more relevant, and reducing difficulty with transition to clinical practice. All reported a general positive experience in enhancing and understanding their future roles as a clinician who will face various challenges in future patient care.

**CONCLUSION**

Early exposure to clinical practice through this community-based service during the initial stage of optometry school enhanced students’ confidence and perception of student clinic. Further objective and longitudinal studies with a larger sample size is needed to assess the actual student performance from their perception.