Human resource development (HRD) – the development of the people who deliver health care – has been identified as one of the key pillars of eye health delivery. HRD is one of the essential building blocks of the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Action Plan: ‘Towards universal eye health’. The importance of HRD is also recognised beyond eye care, as can be seen in the WHO Health Systems approach.

Historically, eye care delivery was mainly the responsibility of ophthalmologists. It soon became clear, however, that in order to effectively reduce avoidable blindness, other types of health care workers would need to be developed, trained and deployed to work with and support ophthalmologists. A team approach would therefore be essential.

In recent years, eye care team development has become an important part of the advocacy and action plans of most global eye health agencies and regional bodies. The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) and the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) both have international committees on HRD, and IAPB has also formed regional HRD committees. One of their key tasks has been to identify gaps and plan HRD for individual groups of eye health providers – including ophthalmic nurses, ophthalmic clinical officers, and optometrists/refractionists – in a way that supports the development of the eye care team as a whole.

The composition of an eye care team varies from region to region and country to country, and it will also differ depending on whether the team is working in a...