



Canadian Optometric Education Trust Fund*

Part IV: The Optometric Manpower Threat to Scope of Practice¹

This is a continuation of our series outlining the practical and urgent needs your Trust Fund is attempting to meet.

One of the principles underlying the establishment of the Trust Fund is that, until we stabilize and then expand our available manpower, our present rather limited pattern of service delivery will continue. As a result, the unmet vision care needs of the public (as identified in previous articles) will be provided by the optometrist.

Within this section of our "Issues in Optometry" position papers, we will develop an overview of the factors that must be considered in the projection of the profession's immediate and future manpower needs. In addition to a number of important areas* the Trust Fund will contribute to both current schools of optometry as well as a third school to ensure manpower needs are met.

The profession of optometry benefitted from a notable expansion of educational facilities immediately after World War II. A significant number of veterans of higher than average college entrance age were graduates of the 1946 to 1950 period. These individuals will be looking forward to retiring in the coming 10 to 15 year period and as a result we will be suffering from a high manpower attrition rate.

An analysis of the current age profiles, with their potential manpower losses, resulted in CAO investigating a wide range of related manpower issues in the 1970's. CAO then concentrated on a western school and has developed a series of detailed briefs on optometric manpower issues for the consideration of health planners in provincial and federal governmental agencies. We will therefore summarize the more

important of these manpower issues, as identified by CAO, in a concise and realistic manner.

Current Supply of Optometrists – A False Sense of Security

The latest edition of Health and Welfare's publication, "Canadian Health Manpower Inventory, 1976" allows us to analyze trends associated with the past (1967) and the current (1977) supply of optometrists from the following perspectives:

- There has been a 32% increase (447 practitioners) in the number of active optometrists in Canada from 1967-77.
- There have been 460 graduates from our existing schools of optometry in the five year period from 1973 to 1977 for an annual average of 92 new practitioners.
- There has been a net increase of 29 optometrists due to immigration from 1967-77 for an annual average of 3 new practitioners.
- The population ratio to active optometrists has improved from 1:15,764 in 1967 to 1:12,734 in 1977

However, when these rather optimistic statistics are viewed in terms of other complicating factors, the profession must develop a deeper concern for the Canadian public's ability to gain access to primary vision care services from an optometrist.

Population Ratio Problem

CAO has advocated the establishment of a conservative population-to-active optometrist ratio of 1:10,000. A review of world literature on this point indicates that the ideal ratio for optometric and medical manpower has been estimated at one optometrist for 7,000 popula-

tion and one ophthalmologist for 35,000 population, giving a 5:1 mixed ratio. These estimates have been confirmed by studies of group practices and health maintenance organizations within the United States and abroad, where optometrists and ophthalmologists work together as a team to provide total vision and eye care to an entire community.

There was an immediate national requirement in 1977 for an additional 503 optometrists to reach the minimum acceptable ratio of 1:10,000 active optometrists. In order to achieve the international ideal ratio of 1:7,000 in Canada there is an immediate need for an additional 1,508 optometrists.

We recognize the limitations of the use of ratios as an indicator of optometric manpower requirements especially when developed without an assessment of other vision care related categories of health care workers. We would therefore stress that the achievement of the ideal optometric manpower ratios would be meaningful only if accomplished along with the corresponding medical manpower ratio of 1:35,000. But the use of such ratios does serve to reveal the present status of available optometric manpower and our concern for the profession's future ability to deliver quality care at affordable prices to Canadian citizens in response to their complete range of primary vision care needs.

Population Growth Problem

If the nation continues to experience, as indicated from 1967 to 1977, an annual population growth of 1.4%, we will require an additional 36 practitioners per year to offset this growth and achieve the desired 1:10,000 ratio.

Manpower Attrition Problem

As already stated, the attrition rate experienced by the profession due to death and retirement will be a

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¹Please see previous issues for parts I-III.

major factor in the coming 10 to 15 year period. When the profession experiences the estimated annual 3% manpower loss, we will have a sustained need for 59 practitioners per year to replace our current manpower at the 1:12,734 ratio.

Aging Population Problem

The optometric manpower situation is further complicated by the fact that in the immediate future there will be a noticeable increase in the percentage of Canadians over 55 years of age. With old age comes gradual deterioration of vision. Consequently, there will be an increased demand for the vision care services offered by the optometrist that our present training facilities will not be able to offset.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that our present ability to graduate from our two existing schools of optometry, only 95 new optometrists each year is just

barely sufficient to offset the current long term pattern of attrition among practising optometrists (59 optometrists) and the need for additional practitioners to offset population growth (36 optometrists). This unfortunate reality is further complicated by the fact that the present ratio of optometrists/population of 1:12,734 is not allowing the profession to provide the unmet vision care needs of the public in a manner that is consistent with our education

and capability for quality care at affordable prices.

It would seem then that optometrists with concern for the continued strength and development of the profession will look to the Trust Fund as a means of guaranteeing solutions to the problems discussed in this series of articles. Please do not underestimate the strength of our collective action when pledging your financial support to this worthwhile and necessary campaign.

DONATIONS FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

In this mailing of the Journal you will find a special donation card to enable you to honour special occasions with a contribution to the Trust Fund.

Such occasions may be a birth, death, graduation, marriage, retirement or other moment that you may wish to commemorate with a special pledge.

Check your Journal envelope for the special card and keep it on file for an appropriate occasion.

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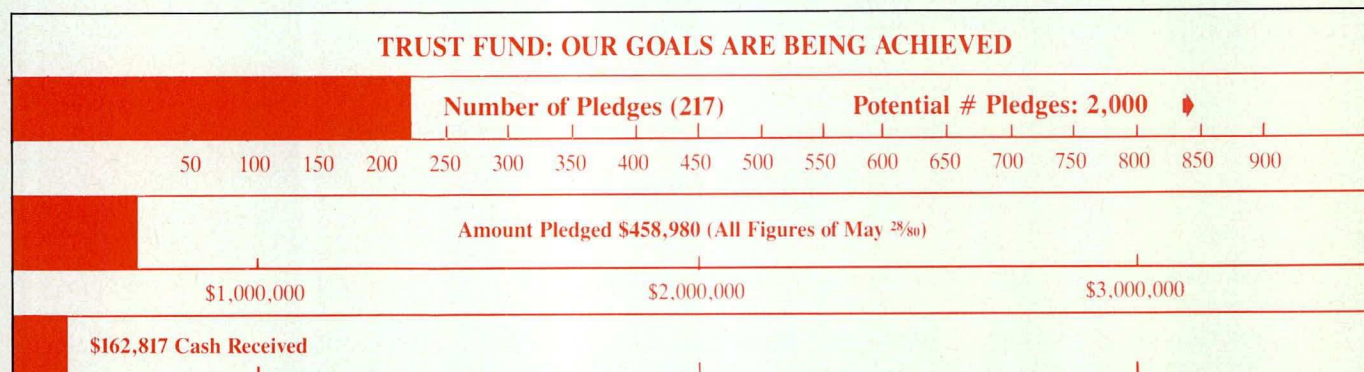
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*Not including 58 donations without pledge cards and special donations.

New Ways to Help the Trust Fund — You Could be a Winner!

The Trust Fund has been the beneficiary of some rather novel fund raising techniques, for which the Trustees are very grateful. In fact the Trustees would like to challenge all our readers to try and top the following schemes, if not financially, then at least in terms of originality: (with a prize to the scheme generating the greatest revenue—see below).

Members of the New Brunswick Optometrical Society raised the grand total of \$13 during a spring golf party and forwarded the pro-

ceeds to the Trust Fund. Not to be outdone, the staff and optometrists in the practice of DesGroseilliers & DesGroseilliers in Ottawa contributed the profits of their coffee fund: \$32.00.

Can you, and/or your colleagues beat that? Consider the gauntlet thrown—prize for the highest contribution by December 31, 1980 is a free subscription to any Canadian journal or magazine, or any optometric journal in the world.

Provincial Breakdown of Donations

	Pledged	Received
B.C.	\$ 91,100	\$32,925
Alta.	\$132,850	\$34,870
Sask.	\$ 49,150	\$28,975
Man.	\$ 62,480	\$25,572
Ont.	\$ 87,150	\$22,357
Que.	\$ —	\$ —
N.B.	\$ 16,900	\$ 7,713
N.S.	\$ 11,750	\$ 6,330
P.E.I.	\$ 2,100	\$ 2,100
Nfld.	\$ 5,500	\$ 1,350
Misc.		\$ 625
Grand Total	\$458,980	\$162,817