



Part V:

The Need for the Creation of a New School of Optometry

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

We must consider the expansion of the Canadian university systems due to its current inability to graduate a sufficient supply of optometrists as the single greatest threat to our continued growth as a profession. But in promoting the objective of a new school of optometry our national and provincial associations have looked at the potential benefits in a broader and more politically sensitive manner. Within this section we will review the details associated with the broad based approach that has been taken in promoting recognition of the need for the creation of a new school of optometry.

1. Impact on the Profession

a) Scope of Practice

As stated in the previous article², until optometric manpower levels are stabilized to meet both attrition and population growth and can reach acceptable population ratios, the present rather limited scope of optometric services will, by necessity, continue. As a result the unmet vision care needs of the target population will persist and the optometrist will not be able to bring to bear the full scope of his training and skills. From this we can therefore conclude that the graduates from a new School of Optometry would naturally be recognized by

existing optometric practitioners as the needed source of additional manpower. Their added numbers will allow the profession to expand our present limited range of services and to provide the full scope of primary vision care services.

b) Continuing Education

The profession through our efforts in continuing education has traditionally recognized the need for clinicians to keep abreast of the many new technological discoveries that become an integral part of the practice of optometry. We regard a School of Optometry as a regional resource that will help meet the continuing education needs of local practitioners, thereby allowing access to a central and easily accessible mechanism that is vital to the practicing optometrists continued growth and competence.

c) Research

The clinician's office serves as a productive site for ongoing studies of a wide variety of technical and practical optometric issues. The profession will gain a greater stability and scientific basis if the benefits of this type of clinical research are properly documented and presented in an acceptable scientific form. The School of Optometry through the research expertise of the faculty will therefore be able to assist the clinicians in the development of research models, the recording of data and the publishing of their research findings in a scientifically acceptable form.

d) Increased Involvement in Primary Care by Ophthalmologists

We have concluded that although both optometrists and ophthalmologists are increasing their available manpower, the medical profession since 1971 continues to enjoy a significant gain of manpower on an annual basis which will be assured for a sustained period of time. The implications of this trend are that if the required number of optometrists are not available across Canada, medical practitioners will increasingly become involved in primary vision care service delivery. In addition, provincial governments will not be able to approach acceptable ratio levels that are needed to maintain an appropriate cost and quality of service balance between optometric and ophthalmological manpower.

2. Impact on the Province and the Educational System

a) The creation of a school of optometry will have a beneficial impact on the province and the educational system from the following points of view:

- i) It will make available a new discipline within the University that provides students with a broader selection of programs and graduate studies;
- ii) It makes available to the Community the broad-based clinical programs associated with optometric education that will function in many of the present unmet needs areas as identified above;
- iii) It will extend the practical bene-

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2. CJO Vol. 42 no. 2 p. 80

fits to optometric research into functional vision problems in areas such as vision restoration, and learning disabilities;

iv) As the only English language training facility in Canada, the School of Optometry at the University of Waterloo is designed in accordance with the Ontario government's estimates of their manpower requirements. The school's admission program is therefore very limited in the number of out-of-province students it can allow to enter. As a result, many qualified individuals from other provinces who are intent on pursuing optometry as a career find it virtually impossible to enter our profession. Their only alternative is to receive their formal education at a foreign institution. This is a very costly and

inappropriate means for your province to train its optometric manpower.

It should also be pointed out that if the University of Waterloo was in a position to admit more out of province students, the hardship imposed by out-of-province study would still persist.

Conclusion

We trust that as a result of reviewing this series of five articles you have developed a greater appreciation for the political and practical reasons for which the Trust Fund has been established. It does have a vital role to play in the continued development of the profession of optometry as a member of the health care delivery system of Canada.

We must not minimize to any ex-

tent the real threats that exist to our present and projected scope of practice role in providing vision and eye care services to the Canadian public.

Each of us must act now to contribute our fair share to the programs that will allow the profession's future goals and aspirations to become a reality. When contacted by your provincial Fund Raising Chairman during Trust Fund Month this September, please remember that your "tax free" contribution is needed immediately. Join with your national colleagues by making a pledge and giving as generously as possible on an annual basis for a five-year period. Only you can identify the actual dollar value of your pledge, but please make that pledge now. None of us can afford not to support the objectives and programs of the Canadian Optometric Education Trust Fund.

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