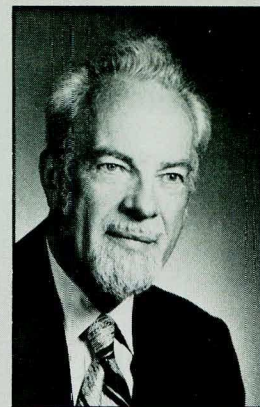


THE OPTOMETRIST'S BALANCE SHEET

by W.M. Lyle*

National Fund-raising Chairman-1980 Campaign



Optometry can be proud of the fact that since 1629, when the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers was chartered in England, optometrists have provided the best possible vision care for the majority of citizens.

The University Schools of Optometry are relatively new and must be viewed as developing structures. This demands more support than can be supplied by Government alone. Strengthening the existing institutions and creating additional educational resources must be a continuing concern of all optometrists.

Each optometrist must occasionally ask himself or herself certain questions. How does the service which I provide compare with that provided by others? Does my community recognize me as a concerned, responsible, caring practitioner? Am I receiving reasonable financial compensation for my training, the responsibility assumed and for my working hours? What of the future of vision care in Canada?

Still Obstacles Left

In Canada, until recently, the cost of acquiring the necessary knowledge was borne by the individual. Government grants were not available to support optometrical vision research and many obstacles were placed in the path of the profession. The work of dedicated individuals within our professional associations has reduced these obstacles to some extent. It is clear, however, that we as a profession still have substantial

problems to eliminate if we are to continue to progress toward our goal of delivering optimum vision care to all Canadians.

Battling Tradition and Prejudice

We must battle certain traditions, established prejudices, an uninformed public and misinformed officials and certain groups who compete for our patients.

The Threat Posed by Ophthalmology's Excess

In Canada, ophthalmologists are three times as numerous per capita as they are in Britain. This excess plus the easier control of infections which has been brought about by antibiotics and antiviral agents has forced ophthalmology to expand into the field of optometry. By their own admission they are underemployed in surgery and undertrained in optics. The average ophthalmologist performs about 85 operations a year, this constitutes 35% of his workload, and therefore he must make 65% of his income by providing refractions.

Boutique Explosions

Across the country, there has been an explosion of boutique-type optician offices accompanied by extensive advertising of materials and prices. This is promoted by the optical manufacturers who establish and support these businesses. The manufacturers also advertise fashion frames and other products directly to the public. Traditionally opticians have also steered patients to ophthalmologists. The threat exists that these pressures could lead to control of optometrical practice by outside forces.

Those who fail to recognize the nature of a professional service are encouraging price advertising. They fail to understand that a professional practice is based on services rendered, not on the promise of advertisements.

Optometrists Well Respected

While many other problems could be placed on the debit side of the balance sheet, it is equally important to recognize that optometrists are well respected by the majority of Canadians, especially those who have tried other routes to obtain eye examinations and other vision care services. Optometrists who provide comprehensive vision care and accept full responsibility for the correcting lenses, if they are required, save the patient from being left in the middle between two practitioners, each of whom is willing to accept only some portion of the responsibility when problems arise.

Optometrists in most communities have an excellent working relationship with physicians who are responsible for the patient's general health problems.

Optometrists achieve reasonable incomes as soon as they have had sufficient time in practice to demonstrate the quality of care they provide.

Optometrists Must Continue Expansion

It is vital to quality vision care that optometrists continue to provide vision care to the majority of Canadians. Any part of the practice of optometry which we neglect is likely to be appropriated by others. Opti-

*M.Sc., O.D., Ph.D.
School of Optometry, Waterloo, Ont.

cians wish to expand contact lens fitting, orthoptists want to provide vision training, manufacturers want to provide eye safety programs and prescriptions for protective spectacles and ophthalmologists want to enter the field of primary optical care. None of these will result in an increased quality of vision care for Canadians. The way to meet these challenges is to strengthen optometry and its practitioners both in quality and quantity.

Facing Facts

First, the average age of optometrists in practice is increasing, the large group who qualified right after the war are facing retirement. We need University spaces so that more of the bright young people who want to enter optometry can do so. Answer: Another School of Op-

tometry, preferably sited in Western Canada.

Second, we need many more qualified teachers, researchers and exceptionally able clinicians to fill the faculty positions. Optometrists in the United States are meeting this challenge with the opening of new optometry schools in Oklahoma in 1979, and in Missouri in 1980. This drain on the teacher pool requires that Canadian optometry meet its challenges from Canadian resources.

It takes at least 10 years to develop a professor qualified to teach in an Optometry school. Answer: grants to support qualified students in graduate school now.

The rapid changes in the contact lens field, in electrodiagnostic methods and in sophisticated instrumentation have made continuing educa-

tion an additional responsibility of all practitioners. This places a further load on our teaching universities.

Self-Sufficiency Must Be Met

In order to maintain and advance optometry, we must plan for the future. We cannot rely on Governments or other societal components to solve optometry's problems or to bring about professional advancement. Each of us must be personally responsible by individual effort and fiscal support. We must give of ourselves and our resources, not until it hurts, but until it counts. Each optometrist can show his or her appreciation of what optometry has done for the patients and the practitioners by supporting the Canadian Optometric Education Trust Fund.

Optica '80 in Cologne - Optica's Report*

Good attendance of the WVAO Congress

The 32nd Annual Congress of the Wissenschaftliche Vereinigung für Augenoptik und Optometrie - WVAO (Scientific Association for Ophthalmic Optics and Optometry), the scientific part of OPTICA '80 held in Cologne May 13th, confirmed its reputation as one of the most important events of this kind world-wide. The number of delegates attending the Congress far exceeded the total expected by the organisers.

Optica reports that an emphasis at the Congress was placed on visual problems resulting from the growth in the use of viewdata equipment at the place of work.

Viewdata equipment does not have any disturbing influence on the eyes provided visual conditions are correctly arranged as for the ambient conditions. But to arrive at the best solution of all problems linked with vision in this sector the near focal range and ambient conditions

should be examined at the actual place of work. The adaptability of the eyes to a workplace featuring viewdata equipment has to be very much greater than for a conventional office job or the eyes must be assisted, by suitable optical aids, to perform such work without any trouble.

Close-up spectacle corrections of the kind represented by reading glasses are not suitable as working glasses as the ranges differ too much from each other. In addition the changed physiological aspects compared with normal office work do not permit this.

Success in achieving complicated adaptation of contact lenses and in determining and adjusting spectacles can best be realised by the knowledge gained from the use of electronic mini computers. The use of these modern aids by opticians leads to even more precise results and therefore to a greater efficiency of the corrected eyesight.

For example, it is possible in future to determine the exact weight of spectacles before they are produced

and make use of other glass materials - there are three - or other spectacle frames to arrange the overall weight in such a way that the new spectacles are very light and comfortable.

Regarding the subject of eyesight for road users, it was mentioned that spectacles should not restrict the field of view. The optical industry pays special attention to this point by offering thin-rimmed spectacle frames with high-set side arms. Moreover, spectacles worn by road users should all be of the anti-reflection type and if possible feature the maximum anti-reflex treatment.

Children who wear spectacles should be offered greater convenience and comfort. Many of the congress delegates were in favour of the development of special safety frames for children with soft supporting pads or bridges. The complaint was raised in this connection that very few children are allowed to choose their own spectacles. This frequently resulted in a disinclination to wear the necessary eyesight correction.

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