



The Newfoundland Optometrical Association Report



Optometry as an organized profession in Newfoundland and Labrador is still very young. During the 1970s, Newfoundland's concerns out of necessity have been more basic than many other parts of Canada. Central to our continued existence and development, has been the need for an increased number of Optometrists. This problem is bound up with the lack of training institutions in Canada. It is little more than 30 years since Newfoundland was closely tied to the U.K. as a consequence of which we entered Confederation with a number of British trained Optometrists. We have accepted British graduates for licence examinations ever since 1949, and as long as a shortage of Canadian trained Optometrists exists, we will probably continue to do so. This mixture of variously trained personnel is rare in Canadian Optometry but has worked well for us.

As recently as 1964, there were only 7 Optometrists in the whole province. Although the number of practitioners began to increase in 1964, due to deaths, retirements, etc, there were only 12 licenced practising Optometrists in 1970. By 1980, the number had increased to 27 with 25 practising. Much of the increase was due to more Newfoundland men and women entering the profession and returning home after graduation.

Optometry was and still is governed by the Optometry Act 1928 (Revised 1952) and though a good act for its day, it was out of date by the 1960s. Starting in 1966, a group of Optometrists began with their lawyer to draw up and present a new act to govern Optometry and legally establish the Newfoundland Optometric Association. This act has been through many drafts and changes over the past twelve years, and has seen several governments and many Ministers of Health come

and go, but is still not passed.

The road that the act has travelled reflected the changes in our society, both provincially and nationally during these past ten years. Strong opposition has come from the Newfoundland Ophthalmological Society and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society as Ophthalmology tried to move into the primary vision care field, and as Medicare tried to refine and improve its public image during the latter part of the decade. What the final form of the Act will be is still not clear. We know what we want and have strongly presented our ideas to our government, but we also know where our opposition comes from. Until the new act becomes law, we must abide by the 1928 act. This act has many loopholes and vague areas which still allow less control over our profession than we would like. This makes Optometry less structured than in some of Canada's more populated provinces.

The Newfoundland Optometric Association was formed in St. John's in 1968 and membership was voluntary as was payment of yearly dues. It says much for the Optometrists of the province that dues have always been paid by everyone even though legally the relicensing fee is still \$10.00. Since the new Optometry Act appeared to be in the offing in 1968, nothing was done to legally incorporate the Association and that is the way it still stands. What the future will be in this regard only time will tell.

The Association was officially made a corporate member of the Canadian Association of Optometrists in 1973 (?) and has tried to contribute its fair share to the Canadian Association of Optometrists since that date. It has paid its full dues and taken part in P.R. projects such as the very successful eclipse project. Until the past three years the Newfoundland Optometric Association has

been handicapped by lack of members with the result that two hats, sometimes three, had to be worn by all. Until 1980, the President of the Optometry board was also the president of the Newfoundland Optometric Association. This year, that has been changed and the two functions separated (anticipating the Optometry Act) due to a doubling of our membership. The increased membership argues well for increased activity in Provincial P.R. Programs, bulletin production, Canadian Association of Optometrists committee participations, etc.

The progress of Optometry during the, '70s can be traced to the arrival of new graduate Optometrists in the mid 1960s and the increased demand for Optometric services by the general public due to the advent of Medicare in 1967. The fledgling Newfoundland Optometric Association presented a brief to the Newfoundland government for the inclusion of Optometrists in Medicare, but was unsuccessful. While most of the other provinces have seen fit to include Optometrists, even by 1980, the Newfoundland government still had not done so. Although this initially put Optometrists at a disadvantage, vis a vis Ophthalmologists, especially in St. John's, the freeing of the average Newfoundlander's funds from medical expenses and the advent of pre-paid insurance plans covering vision care allowed more people to seek Optometric services.

During the early to mid '70s, a number of General Practitioners, following little or no proper training, began refracting. MCP paid them the non-specialist's fee for this service. They were usually involved with some form of optical dispensing and advertised free eye-examinations. This was another and more potent threat to Optometry in Newfoundland. Unfortunately, this

trend was encouraged by some Ophthalmologists and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. In St. John's, several of our members were temporarily hurt by these people. However, as the decade progressed, the public began to see through these "eye specialists", and their impact began to wane. The Newfoundland Optometric Association is still vigorously pushing for Optometry's inclusion in Medicare and there is some hope that this goal may be reached shortly after 13 years effort.

During the '70s, the Newfoundland Optometric Association has made every effort to make its presence known to Departments of Government. We have, I think, raised the consciousness of the De-

partment of Health with regards to Optometry quite significantly. Payment for our services on a fee basis, with realistic fees and materials at cost was established and maintained throughout the decade. Parallel with this and based on our Department of Health agreements have been agreements with D.V.A. and the R.C.M.P. These agreements are updated yearly.

The province of Newfoundland like many of our less densely populated parts of the country offers a special challenge to practising Optometry. There are few large communities and the population is scattered over 390,000 square kms and along 16,000 kms of coast line. Branch offices are a necessity for

many Optometrists, especially those building their practices. Some of our more remote communities have to be serviced by travelling Optometrists. As our numbers increase and transportation improves, these will disappear from the scene.

Although some members of our Association have opposed increasing the number of Optometrists in the province, more reasoned consideration indicates that only by increasing our numerical strength can we continue to prosper and improve services to our patients. The eighties decade should see continued improvement in our profession in this province and I hope it will be as lively and interesting as it has been in the past ten years.

John A. Snow O.D.

CAO Congratulates the University of Waterloo's School of Optometry 1980 Graduates

James Agate O.D.
James Agnew O.D.
Bradley Almond O.D.
Joh Astles O.D.
Sondra Berman O.D.
John Bruno O.D.
Lois Calder O.D.
Paul Chapman O.D.
Lesia Ciz O.D.
David Dobbelsteyn O.D.
Randall Dyke O.D.
Ian Edmison O.D.
Arnold Eitutis O.D.
Alexander Erdie O.D.
H. Steven Garrett O.D.
Steven Gold O.D.
Grand Goodes O.D.
Paul Gray O.D.
Melvin Haché O.D.
David Hampton O.D.
Richard Hareychuk O.D.
Gordon Hensel O.D.
Susan Joe O.D.
Katharine Johns O.D.
Larry Kanters O.D.
Allan Kaufman O.D.
F. Glenn King O.D.

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Ida Kiss O.D.
Gerald Leinweber O.D.
Patrick Lo O.D.
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Gregorio D'Orio O.D.
Julia A. Holterman O.D.
Surrinder Mahil O.D.

M.Sc. Physiological Optics
Pamela Earle

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