

COETF

Philanthropy or just "paying our dues"?

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So much has been written about the Canadian Optometric Education Trust Fund since its inception in 1976 that a summary of its purpose and goals is, I believe, in order.

The TRUST FUND was created simply to preserve and strengthen Canadian Optometry. The word "preserve" suggests that the survival of optometry is endangered and indeed it is. Let the statistics speak for themselves. In the last twenty years the number of Canadian optometrists has increased by 33%. But ophthalmologists have increased 133% in the same period. In the next fifteen years 40% of our present practitioners will retire. Population increase and attrition rates indicate that the western provinces alone will require thirty new optometrists each year. And we are still not filling the "unmet needs" so eloquently described in the now historic 1974 paper, "The Role of the Optometrist in Health Care Delivery."

It would not be melodramatic to say that there are, at present, real threats to the scope of Optometric Health Care; political threats, medical threats and manpower shortage threats. The governments in Canada, following those in the U.S., clearly intend to reduce the influence of all professional groups that function as a service delivery monopoly. The advertising of fees, portability of prescription, the ophthalmic industry's promotion of materials as cosmetic or beauty aids, rather than health prostheses, the relinquishing of dispensing by 25% of optometrists in some provinces are grave problems that the Trust Fund intends to deal with.

Those of you in practise ten years ago will recall the glow of professional pride that pervaded the profession on achieving primary care status with legislation to allow use of diagnostic drugs. Our colleagues in

ophthalmology developed at that time, a two-fold action policy to achieve their goals, one of which was to be associated with primary vision care and the other, to promote access of the public to their offices (unlike other specialists who require referral). A similar successful attainment of objectives awaits Optometry on the day when we can announce the satisfactory achievement of our public service goals through the Trust Fund program. That "glow of professional pride" will be guaranteed constant rekindling in spite of the continued economically motivated opposition from medicine.

Finally there is the issue of a new School of Optometry. Because of the herculean effort of the early committee, I share the opinion that there will soon be a new school in western Canada. Support for it is growing daily, despite the remaining political hurdles.

The Trust Fund's goal is to raise \$3,000,000, the interest from which will be used to encourage better educational personnel and facilities, including libraries, for both the present school and the new school, when it is built.

It will use its funds for practitioner research in those fields pioneered by Optometry, i.e., contact lens therapy, occupational vision, low vision and pediatrics.

By increasing optometric manpower the COETF will also help us to stop the present trespassing by unlicensed personnel who are now performing treatment and diagnostic services for patients by the unlawful use of refractors, ophthalmometers and biomicroscopes.

As this year's National Chairman I am absolutely convinced that a well financed programme such as the Trust Fund, raised within the profession and administered by OUR profession is the ONLY effective method

of combating the threats to our scope and mode of vision care practice.

The Trust Fund plans to use interest funds to provide a "Chair in Continuing Education." Who among us would not agree that, through continued education, we will strengthen our local reputation, so that more and more Canadians will seek, not just eye services, but Optometrical vision care services.

Canadian Optometrists earn adequate incomes equal to engineers, accountants, dentists and physicians. Pledging to the Trust Fund over several years makes the accumulated donation painless. One percent of a year's average earnings, (\$500) is really not that much of a sacrifice. The \$2000-3000 pledge you give will still be working for the profession a hundred years from now, since the Trust Fund intends to make its grants and expenditures from interest, not capital.

I deem it a privilege to serve along with your Provincial Chairmen as part of an all volunteer program that is cost efficient and soundly administered. I consider my own initial \$2000 pledge as a way of "paying my dues", as well as "looking after my own".

Optometry is providing me with a rich, full, prestigious and rewarding position in my community as indeed it must be providing the same for you in yours. I just can't think of a better way of showing my appreciation than by supporting my provincial chairman of the Trust Fund. I ask every one of my colleagues in Canada to do the same.