



OPINION

Inaugural Comments from Dr. June Robertson, President, Ontario Association of Optometrists

I must tell you how proud I am to stand here, as my predecessors for 75 years have stood, to pledge my devotion to you, the Ontario Association of Optometrists.

As my first official act, I intend to jog your memories with some gentle reminders.

This is, you know (in your heart of hearts), a most happy profession. Optometry as a career is the best choice you could have made. What other profession can apply its knowledge so easily and painlessly with the assurance of such a high success rate? The benefits you give your patients extend throughout every facet of their lives. What more can one desire in terms of job satisfaction?

There have always been malcontents and renegades within Optometry — certainly there still are and will continue to be. But view these as signs of a living, changing profession. Discontent with conditions in Optometry has ultimately resulted in advancement.

There have always been assaults on us from without the profession. Surely, that's an indication of our stature — we are a profession to be reckoned with.

We, who have been around long enough to remember how it used to be, can sometimes be heard to complain about the attitudes of our young graduates — their supreme self-assurance and high expectations. But is this attitude not a reflection of their high regard for, and faith in, their chosen profession?

Yesterday, one of our guest speakers advised his listeners to "get back to their basic strengths". Our strengths have been, and will continue to be, our people and the services they provide. I believe we will, in the near future, focus these strengths in two areas.

In the next twenty years, according to the Ministry of Treasury and Economics, the elderly population will increase by 63%. In some areas of the province, such as my own region of Halton, the increase is expected to reach 300%! The emphasis on Low Vision Services, and on Geriatric Vision is timely and must be pursued.

The guest speaker at the College meeting told us that Consumerism is here to stay. Listen to what the Father of Consumerism told the New England Council of Optometrists. I quote Ralph Nader.

I think the increasing trend toward looking at the eye through the medical model may be taking some of the profession's orientation away from what it can be doing best, and that is working on visual training, vision education and, above all, learning disorders with children.

How many optometrists are working with children, and if there is not very much money in it, how can the system be changed so that it can be attractive? So many children and their parents don't know why their children aren't learning. They have all kinds of theories, of course, but certainly the visual health status of the student has been shown repeatedly, in case after case, to be extraordinarily critical. This is something you optometrists are better suited for than ophthalmologists who look at eye problems more genetically.

This is a great and very much needed area, working with children, and it's something which I think you may have a lot of other groups in the country who are dealing with the *end* results of learning disorders to work with. They're not particularly focused on the visual problems — that's not where their training is — but they're very worried about youngsters who cannot learn how to read and who cannot learn when all other signs indicate that they *should* be able to.

A number of you (too few!) are just venturing into this sphere of practice. I urge you to continue, and promise you undreamed-of satisfaction in the service of children.

Why don't we aim for one optometrist in *each* of these special interest practices within referring distance throughout the province? Those who do not develop a special service will, I know, lend support by their referrals.

The final reminders fall under the category of "ation". For the time being, I ask you to consider the personal applications of "obligation", "participation" and "communication".

Editor's note: Dr. Robertson then concluded her address by, as she put it, "setting an example of communication" and introducing to the Members present their new Executive, Board and Chairpersons of the province's Standing Committees.