

Some Selected Dates and Events from the History of the Centre for Sight Enhancement

George C. Woo, O.D., Ph.D.

July 1967: The School of Optometry became a reality. The formerly independent College of Optometry of Ontario moved from Toronto, and became an integral part of the Faculty of Science, University of Waterloo.

July 1970: Dr. George Woo was appointed as an Assistant Professor at the University of Waterloo. After graduating from the College of Optometry of Ontario in 1964, he practised Optometry with The Canadian Red Cross Society for two years. Subsequently he enrolled as a graduate student at Indiana University where he received his M.Sc. (1968) and Ph.D. (1970) degrees in Physiological Optics.

September 1971: Through several discussions with Dr. E.J. Fisher, the Director of the School, and Dr. M.E. Woodruff, the Clinic Director, it was decided that Dr. Woo should be responsible for a specialty area in the School of Optometry called low vision. He was to commence work in this area as a consultant.

May 1972: Dr. W. Feinbloom visited the University of Waterloo. There were several evening clinics held. A large number of patients attended these clinics, and after Dr. Feinbloom's departure, Dr. Woo was asked to follow up these low vision patients. This was the beginning of an active low vision clinic at the school.

September 1972: After a year's experience in the low vision area, a half day clinic was set aside to serve the partially sighted. Students were scheduled to rotate through this clinic whenever possible.

January 1974: A didactic course on low vision was initiated at the School of Optometry. Dr. Woo has been the sole instructor for the course, except for 1984 when he was on a sabbatical leave and the course was taught by Dr. Graham Strong.

June 1974: To further his interest in low vision, Dr. Woo visited Professor Louise Sloan at the Wilmer Institute of Ophthalmology at the Johns Hopkins University for an extended period of time. Throughout this time Drs. Sloan and Woo conferred daily, looking after low vision patients' needs.

December 1975: Dr. Woo completed the requirements for the diplomate in low vision, sponsored by the American Academy of Optometry. The program included written, oral, clinical and practical examinations. He wrote his final examination at the College of Optometry of the Ohio State University, and became the only Canadian optometrist to hold this qualification in the last decade.

September 1976: Dr. John Jantzi became a clinician at the School of Optometry with part time duties in the low vision clinic. He graduated from the School in 1974, winning the first general proficiency prize. After a year of private practice, he returned to the University. In the next four years, he completed a residency in low vision and an M.Sc. degree in Physiological

Optics, in addition to serving as a low vision clinician. He moved to Vancouver, British Columbia in 1980, where he maintains a low vision practice.

January 1977: Dr. Woo took a sabbatical leave for six months. He visited the University of Melbourne, the University of New South Wales and Queensland Institute of Technology. In addition, he served as a consultant optometrist at Kooyong's Low Vision Clinic of the Association of the Blind in Victoria. The Kooyong Clinic is generally regarded as the best interdisciplinary low vision clinic in the world.

September 1979: Dr. Dagmar Lutzi, a 1978 graduate of the School of Optometry, served as a part time low vision clinician for two academic years. Dr. William Bobier, also a 1978 graduate of the School of Optometry, served as a part time low vision clinician for an academic year.

September 1978: Dr. Woo was invited to become a member of the Waterloo Regional Advisory Board of the CNIB. He remained in that position for five years before Dr. Strong replaced him in June, 1983.

September 1979: Dr. J. Graham Strong, who graduated from the School of Optometry at the University of Waterloo in 1970, returned to Waterloo to become a clinic supervisor in 1979. He served part time as a low vision clinician. In 1983, he completed an M.Sc. degree in Physiological Optics. A year later he became an assistant professor. In 1985, he became the Chief of Clinics at the School of Optometry. He is still maintaining an interest in low vision.

September 1981: Dr. Rodger Pace, who graduated from the School of Optometry in 1974, has been a clinical supervisor for a number of years. After graduation, he served as a resident in the clinic, then in private practice and subsequently returned to clinical duties in the School. While he was a student, he earned top honours in his year. In 1985, he enrolled in the diplomate program in low vision. Most likely, he will be the second Canadian optometrist possessing a diplomate in low vision.

June 1982: Dr. Eleanor Faye visited our low vision clinic and gave continuing education courses.

August 1982: Dr. Woo was invited to serve as a consultant to the Optometric Institute of Toronto. He served as the chief of low vision for three years until August 1985. During this period, he spent one day each month attending low vision patients at the Institute.

June 1983: The Ministry of Health of the Government of Ontario invited Dr. Woo to become a member of the Assistive Devices Program. Due to his sabbatical leave, he was unable to serve. Dr. Strong was invited to take up the position on the ADP committee. Shortly afterwards, the ADP program for optical aids was implemented and an ADP high technology

equipment grant was awarded to the Centre for Sight Enhancement in September 1984.

June 1983: Dr. William F. Long, associate professor of Optometry at the University of Missouri worked with Dr. Woo at the Low Vision Clinic for a period of six weeks. A joint research project was completed in that period.

August 1983: The Saskatchewan Association of Optometrists invited Dr. Woo to serve as a consultant to the establishment of an interdisciplinary low vision clinic. Subsequent to his visits, the first Canadian Ophthalmology-Optometry Low Vision Clinic was in operation at Regina's Pasqual Hospital. Drs. D. Turnbull and D. Monea are low vision clinicians having full hospital privileges.

September 1983: Dr. Woo took his second sabbatical leave, as a visiting professor at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry, and a consultant to the various low vision units attached to the College until December 1984. From January 1984 to April 1984, he was a visiting scholar at Cambridge University's Department of Physiology, and the Addenbroke Hospital.

September 1983: Dr. Keith Ames, a graduate from the College of Optometry, The Ohio State University, served as a low vision clinician until May 1984.

August 1984: Dr. Ann Plotkin, a graduate of Pennsylvania College of Optometry, completed her low vision residency at the Eye Institute of PCO in 1984 and joined our school as a clinical supervisor. Dr. Lois Calder, a 1980 graduate of the School served as part-time clinician in the Low Vision Clinic until May 1985. She served as a low vision clinician in the month of December 1985.

October 1984: Dr. Lea Hyvarinen visited the Low Vision Clinic and gave continuing education courses in June 1985 and 1986.

October 1984: The Kurzweil reading machine was relocated from the University library to our Opto-Electronic Sensory Aids room. Room 149 was added to the Clinic. The donor, Mrs. Elizabeth Burton, visited the area several times in early 1986.

October 1984: Dr. Woo was invited to become a member of the Committee on Low Vision of the Ministry of Community and Social Services. In the following 6 months, a series of meetings was held. Subsequently, 3 positions at the Centre for Sight Enhancement were funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

January 1985: An official opening of the Centre for Sight Enhancement was conducted by Mr. Dennis Timbrell, former Ontario Minister of Health responsible for setting up funds for the Assistive Devices Program. Others in attendance included The Honorable Walter McLean, Secretary of State of the Federal Government, Herb Epp, M.P.P. for Waterloo, and Dr. D. T. Wright, President of the University. Within the Centre, there are three components: clinical services, research and opto-electronic sensory aids.

January 1985: The CNIB provided a part time nurse to serve at our Centre for Sight Enhancement, on a six month experimental basis. Mrs. Claudia Day filled that position.

February 1985: Mrs. Mary Hall, a secretary typist funded by The Ministry of Community and Social Services, joined the Centre for Sight Enhancement. She left the Centre in March 1986. Mrs. Judy Li replaced her in May 1986.

April 1985: Mr. Alan Pope, then the Ontario Minister of Health, visited the Centre for Sight Enhancement with many encouraging remarks.

May 1985: Ms. Kris Trotter, a technologist funded by The Ministry of Community and Social Services was hired for our Centre. She continued to serve as a part time technologist at the Centre until December 1986.

June 1985: Ms. Karen Cassidy, our interim social worker, funded by The Ministry of Community and Social Services, joined our Centre. She has been replaced by a permanent social worker, Mrs. M. Visser, on July 22, 1985.

June 1985: Dr. Jan Kitchin from Queensland Institute of Technology conducted a joint research project with Dr. Woo. In addition she served as a consultant to our Centre for Sight Enhancement. She also participated in our Continuing Education program.

July 1985: Ms. Lynne Hanna, our first administrator for the Centre for Sight Enhancement, joined us on July 15th, replacing Mrs. G. Smith, who shall be working in the School part time.

January 1986: Barry Turner, a physics student, conducted a research project on the Magnilink under the supervision of Dr. George Woo (January to April 1986).

April 1986: Funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services was renewed for an additional year.

May 1986: Judy Li joined the Centre as our new Secretary, funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. She resigned in April 1987 to join her husband in Montreal.

June 1986: The Centre for Sight Enhancement was host to the first Canadian International Symposium on Low Vision. This three day event attracted 170 registrants from 10 countries and speakers of international repute in Optometry, Ophthalmology and Vision Rehabilitation. The organizers of the event included Drs. G. Woo, R. Pace and Ms. Hanna.

October 1986: Pauline Bevers joined the Centre staff as the Low Vision Assistant, funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. She replaces Kris Trotter.

October 1986: Terry Bray, a blind individual, came to the Centre from Vocational Rehabilitation Services for a six week occupational assessment. During this period, he wrote a report on the use of the Kurzweil Reading Machine for the Blind.

April 1987: Ms. Lynne Hanna resigned her position as Co-ordinator of the Centre.

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