

OEP

A Network for 1991 and Beyond

Guest Editor, Robert A. Williams, OEP Executive Director

We are often asked, "What is OEP?" and "What direction is it headed?" There is no doubt that OEP has been evolving since the organization was founded in 1928 and that the substance of OEP has changed over the years. OEP is not the same organization it was in 1928 or 1976. What has not changed is the OEP mission. OEP is still in the business of "service to humanity through education in behavioral vision care."

In the formative years, it was necessary to lay a foundation by providing education through printed curricula and seminars. Behavioral optometry did not exist before the formation of the Optometric Extension Program. Drs. Alexander and Skeffington and their many associates formulated the core concepts, took them to the profession through the publications, seminars, congresses and forums, and developed the clinical regimens that eventually became what we now know as behavioral optometry.

The OEP Foundation was the vehicle for the delivery of information to a mass audience and the network through which information flowed. In the beginning, the network was filled with the writings and lectures

of Skeffington and a handful of his closest associates: Getman, Lesser, Renshaw, Harmon, Macdonald, Hendrickson, Crow, Greenstein, Barstow and others. Over the past decade, we have experienced the loss of virtually all of the first generation leaders in behavioral optometry and many who followed closely in their footsteps. Beginning in 1976 with Skeffington's death and continuing with the subsequent passing of many of the founders and second generation leaders and writers, concern has been expressed about the future of OEP and behavioral vision care. Who will replace Elliott Forrest, Charles Margach, Daniel Wolf, Bruce Wolff, Ralph Schrock and all of the others who played the important roles? Who will do the writing and lecturing?

Because OEP is a network, the foundation laid by these late leaders has been and will be shared with countless thousands of optometrists around the world. OEP Clinical Associates have benefited from the thinking as well as the writing and lecturing of the founders of OEP and behavioral optometry for 64 years.

OEP is not a clinical care regimen. It is not a set of dogma. OEP is a network for the sharing of ideas, philosophies, clinical regimens and information. Without a doubt, OEP is a network in, of and for behavioral optometry. Just as OEP has been evolving since its inception, so has behavioral optometry. OEP, the network, depends on constant input from the practitioners of behavioral optometry just as it has from its very inception. The perceived quality and viability of behavioral vision care is directly dependent on the quality of

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the output of OEP, the network for behavioral optometry.

As the major vehicle for information regarding clinical behavioral vision care, the output of OEP is judged to be the body of knowledge of behavioral vision care. However, OEP cannot, will not and never has dictated the way the clinician should practice. OEP shares information so that the participants in the network have access to the body of knowledge that is behavioral optometry. The one consistancy that I have seen in behavioral vision care is the difference from practitioner to practitioner. These small differences, these sometimes competing philosophies of behavioral optometric vision care, this constant evolution of thought, methods and treatment regimens are the reasons why OEP exists in 1991. The OEP Foundation, this journal, the curriculum monographs, the seminars and congresses, all exist so that individual practitioners can discover and understand how and why their colleagues practice as they do. There will probably never be another Skeffington, Getman or Hendrickson. From this time forward, behavioral optometry will operate without a single apostle as the source of all knowledge. That role will continue to be shared by all behavioral practitioners. OEP is the network through which they will communicate between themselves and with the future generations of behavioral optometrists.