

EDITORIAL

TO MY NEW CLASSMATES

One of the gifts accorded faculty members at this time of the year is to share in the anticipation and excitement of those who are about to graduate. Most optometrists have been personally involved in two of these ceremonies and then, usually later in life, participate more vicariously when their children complete college, graduate or professional programs. Faculty participation is limited only by the individual's length of service and willingness to attend.

I've attended many optometric graduation ceremonies over the past two decades. Somehow, I've never gotten used to them. As I watch the candidates marching down the aisle, and later see them receiving their diplomas, a series of emotions occurs that invariably moves me to tears. It is not simply the ambience of that special day that is acting on me, but rather the product of interactions with these people over several years. Their parents, spouses and other loved ones know something of what these people in cap and gown have experienced over the last four years and are justifiably proud of these new optometrists. However, only a faculty member can truly appreciate what they have gone through, and the magnitude of the accomplishment that is being recognized on graduation day.

On May 29, 1992, the Southern College of Optometry bestowed the honorary degree of Doctor of Ocular Science on me at its graduation ceremony in Memphis, Tennessee. Consequently, if we bend the rules just a little, I can identify myself as one of the most senior members of the Class of '92, at least in optometry. As such I feel entitled to make some obser-

vations and give some advice to my approximately 1200 classmates who will be receiving their degrees of Doctor of Optometry. I can be both classmate and mentor, and this is indeed a unique position.

Classmates, please don't sell yourselves short. I know that the insecurity you feel about your ability to provide patient care is shared by your counterparts in the other health care professions. That's why they describe what we all do as "practice." Understand that your education is the most comprehensive that has ever been provided to optometry students, and it will serve as the basis for lifelong learning. Your future development and expertise will be the product of your own curiosity, continuing professional education programs, and, most importantly, ethical and responsible patient care experience.

The exact nature of your future activities and situations will now probably appear clouded for most of you. Please appreciate that this is true of the world at large. The years of your optometric education coincided with the time that Germany broke down its walls; that Communism was discarded by the nation of its birth; that IBM laid off employees of long standing; that Macy's closed stores; that a questionable jury decision set off violence, pillaging and riots in a city known for being "cool"; that the nation's political parties have failed to supply us with the leadership we need and deserve; that you are entering practice at a time when our health care delivery system is about to burst at the seams. Please understand that the uncertainty of where you will be and what you will be doing in the immediate fu-

ture is an indication that optometry is a microcosm of the world and life itself. Do not be intimidated by all this. You are living through an historical time. Great change has always offered great opportunities. Your profession has positioned itself extremely well by virtue of the richness of what it has to offer the public in terms of the diagnosis and treatment of ocular and visual dysfunctions. Not only can you provide cost effective treatment of ocular disease, but, more significantly, you can provide both compensatory and preventative interventions for those visual dysfunctions that are being recognized as side effects of an increasingly information-based, computer-dependent society.

I could go on, but then I'd be overdoing my role as mentor. Consequently, I'll stop here, and as a non-traditional classmate welcome all of you to today's most changing, challenging and dynamic health care profession. My sincere hope is that you have as good a time as I've had.



Irwin B. Suchoff, O.D.