

Statement by S. Thomas Scarborough, O.D.*

Thank you for giving me a few minutes. I would like to ask that you consider that the staff of the Commission on Higher Education and the Task Force on Optometric Education of the Health Education Authority have done a beautiful job in answering the question of need. I am not qualified to prove that there is need for a school of optometry in South Carolina. I think it is presumptuous of ophthalmologists to say that there does not exist need for a school of optometry. I think perhaps the optometrists could answer the question better, but I refer it to the qualified people in the academic world who better understand the assessment of need and who are capable of making such studies.

As far as cooperation between optometry and ophthalmology, when the Albert Storm Eye Institute was being proposed, and the Legislature was considering funding it, representatives from the professions of optometry and ophthalmology jointly requested that the Legislature appropriate the necessary funds. Optometry is not always at odds with ophthalmology. I wish that the ophthalmologists would remember that optometrists had supported them in that project. Optometrists have not once said, "Do not train any more ophthalmologists in South Carolina," as the ophthalmologists are doing here today. Cooperation between the two professions exists on a one-to-one basis. Optometrists have a good relationship with Dr. Vallotton at MUSC, and today he is lecturing to 16 optometrists in the Albert Storm Eye Institute. There is on-going interchange between the two groups. If the proposed school of optometry is approved, both President Knisely and Dr. Vallotton are reasonable men and will do everything possible to work out the problems that may confront the two groups.

Dr. Bobo did not accede to even one point today in the report of the Committee on Need, but refuted every single point. Dr. Bobo belittles and continually downgrades optometry and its educational methods. In my opinion, it is an economic problem, and nothing is behind the issue except competition for the same dollar. Ophthalmologists did not oppose the schools of dentistry, nursing, or pharmacy; why should they oppose the school of optometry? Dentists are not practicing medicine. Optometrists are not practicing medicine. We do not want to practice medicine or to be trained in medicine. We want to be trained as optometrists in optometry at the Medical University of South Carolina so that we might cooperate with the ophthalmologists and others with whom we must work and to whom we need to refer our patients.

Ophthalmologists spend a great part of their time doing refraction work that optometrists also do. Dr. Bobo says that it takes very little training to learn to flip dials and do refractions, and yet the ophthalmologists spend a great percentage of their time flipping the dials and doing refractive work. Why should specialists such as ophthalmologists want to do refractions? I respect them for their capabilities. When my eye needs surgery or medical treatment, I want an ophthalmologist to see me. They don't need to be trained as ophthalmologists, however, to refract eyeglasses. And yet they oppose optometrists who have been doing the job of optometry.

*Comments by S. Thomas Scarborough, O.D., member, Liaison Committee on the Interrelationships of Ophthalmology and Optometry, and President of the South Carolina Optometric Association, at the meeting of the Commission on Higher Education, April 7, 1977, Columbia, South Carolina.