

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF  
LAW GOVERNING THE PROFESSION

Optometry is today a legally recognized and defined profession. Though the phraseology of the law may differ in various localities, it conveys everywhere the general impression, that optometry consists of the examination of human eyes, and their correction by non-medical methods through optical aids and devices, to improve vision and associated supportive functions. Describing thus the limits within which the profession may extend public service and attain its legitimate objective.

The codification of any profession, whether optometry, law medicine or dentistry is a sign of definite social and professional development. Primitive societies do not enjoy the facilities, comforts and services available in professionally progressive communities, and therefore have no legal provisions to regulate professional services or establish their public status. Consequently, the methods of their practitioners – if they can be called such, are crude and haphazard, and extend far beyond the natural limits of their purported field. And having no legal standing, they are without an internal organization to guide them toward a common objective and develop their special branch of service.

I have in my possession the facsimile of an advertisement, professional advertisement, if you please, by a surgeon called Roger Giles. This remarkable instrument reposes now in a London museum and enumerates about 81 different occupations in which Roger Giles claims to have been versatile. What a paradise for professional free-lancers his age must have been! Judging from the appearance of the publication, it has all the airs of antiquity. Though we may admire the extensive operations of Roger Giles, we cannot but question his personal skill and efficiency in all his vocations. He was a parish clerk and school master, grocer and undertaker, dancing teacher and music instructor sold godfather's cordials, out corns and bunions, doctored horses and clipped donkeys. Sold Jew's harps, penny whistles, hens fowls, pigs, herrings, mice traps, grindstones, lollypops, lobsters, crickets, rags, matches, pickles, seeds and winds up with the patriotic exclamation: "God save the king" as a clever political gesture.

Evidently Roger Giles was not afraid to try his hand at anything that yielded a profit, because "times is cruel" and the depression had hit him hard. He continued to add new activities, serving his community in almost any capacity, just to make a living. Though his accomplishments were numerous, viewed from our advanced professional position, we hesitate to endorse him, because he fails to mention a diploma or state board certificate, certifying him as qualified to practice any of the services advertised. It is very doubtful whether his professional efficiency ever caught up with his remarkable diversification. We may even venture to say that the advertisement discloses a rather primitive social order and crude professional consciousness. Because when a man sells rags, fowls, groceries, liquor, and doctors horses and donkeys, out corns and bunions, and calls himself a surgeon, he cannot live under a very advanced social system nor can professional services claim merited public recognition. To have propounded at that time such a theme as "THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF LAW GOVERNING THE PROFESSION," would have sounded just as strange, as discussing the atomic theory, because none of these problems existed. Social and intellectual development must attain first a certain degree of maturity before such questions are even thought of.

Therefore, modern statutory regulations of optometric service record the historic fact, that our social life is well advanced and its safety demands supervised professional services. Granting therefore, to Optometry the right to engage in this special branch of practice, it receives vested legal rights and public recognition. This attainment must be regarded as the fulfillment of a professional ideal, fostered and developed by the leaders in the profession, who were desirous to raise the achievements of their fellow practitioners to a higher level, and secure to future generations a clearer conception of optometric objectives. Because it cannot be denied that the legal requirements have a constructive influence upon the profession as a whole.

Though the law demands compliance, its intention is to regulate principles and methods of practice to improve efficiency and quality of service. The wisdom and efficiency of such regulatory laws may be questioned by many, their enactment, however, is unavoidable in the wake of general progress and must be accepted as the fruit of an advancing age. Since the provisions, however, effect the welfare of every practitioner, no one can be indifferent of the nature and influence upon the profession. But the fact that the practice is being regulated is of fundamental significance and has a decided effect upon its future development.

Analyzing the statutory requirements, in the light of what has been said, we discover that it closes the field forever against optometric free-lancers, by demanding adherence to a single standard of practice and ethical professional conduct, thus preparing the path for orderly and scientific optometric service. The assurance of ever attaining this ultimate ideal rests upon the provision in demanding from its candidates definite didactic qualifications.

Compliance with these stipulations compels a revision of optometric practice, as known to old-timers, in order to come within the purview of legal definition, thus forcing every practitioner into new and improved channels of practice, marking the birth of a new era, in education, practice and social standing. The introduction of such comprehensive innovations are never without strenuous opposition from ultra-conservative forces, who regard all changes as radical departures from traditional forces, who regard all changes as radical departures from traditional customs, and therefore dangerous. Their counsel, however, is unreliable, because history has repeatedly show that the survival of a profession, does not depend upon its retrospect but rather upon the willingness to meet the challenge of a new day, adopt a new attitude b y making the necessary changes and thus qualify to meet the problems of new conditions. That optometry has heard the call is evidence of its virility and idealism. It stepped forward, proclaimed its own entity in the family of professions, ready to assume its place and govern its own affairs.