THE HOFSTETTER EFFECT – A VISION IN WORLD OPTOMETRY

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doi: 10.14434/hindsight.v50i2.26590

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the international impact of Optometric Historical Society founder Henry W Hofstetter, O.D., Ph.D. The article illuminates how Hofstetter's involvement and interest in international optometry history influenced the organization.

KEYWORDS

international optometry; biography; Hofstetter; optometry education; Indiana University; Optometric Historical Society

"...obstacles and hurdles that ordinarily seem local in origin are in fact worldwide, differing, like allergies, only in their superficial manifestations"

— Henry W Hofstetter

First World Conference on Optometric Education, Houston, Texas, 1990

The world is a lot smaller today than it was fifty years ago – not physically, but in terms of global connectivity, engagement and conformity to international doctrines and standards. This is no more evident than in the profession of optometry. The work of entities like the World Council of Optometry, the Asia Pacific Council of Optometry, the Asociación Latinoamericana de Optometría y Óptica and the Brien Holden Vision Institute document organized optometry's modern-day role in modeling the international scope, perspective and recognition of today's profession. It is not that unusual today to read about partnerships and collaborations between schools of optometry across international borders or U.S. facilitation of new programs of patient care on foreign soils, but that was not always the case. Internationalism in optometry is a relatively recent practice. What may not be as evident, particularly among the younger generation of optometrists, is the role one particular individual played in defining the international domain of professional optometry.

If one Googles Professor Henry W Hofstetter (1914-2002), a sizeable number of results appear, most of which reference his biographic progressions from humble beginnings in Ohio to receipt of a bachelor's degree in optometry and the first Ph.D. in physiological optics granted by a U.S. optometry school to the top administrative positions at the Los Angeles College of Optometry (Southern California

College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University) and the Division of Optometry at Indiana University (Indiana University School of Optometry). Those with a sense of history may also know Professor Hofstetter as the author of *Optometry: Professional, Economic, and Legal Aspects*^{1,2} and *Industrial Vision*³ or as co-editor of five editions of the *Dictionary of Visual Science/Dictionary of Visual Science and Related Clinical Terms*⁴⁻⁹. His research and published papers on accommodation and convergence, binocular vision and other clinical topics may also be familiar to students of vision science. However, aside from the biographic reference to his International Optometrist of the Year award from the International Optometric and Optical League (1990) and the Distinguished Service Award from the World Council of Optometry (1999), little information is provided to the casual observer on the impact and significance of Professor Hofstetter's contributions to the evolution of optometry on the international stage.

It is well documented that the origins of what we today refer to as optometry date back centuries and flow from the geographies of Arabia, Greece, Italy, Egypt, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, England and the United States. However, in writing about optometry and related ophthalmic practices outside the United States, Professor Hofstetter stated in his 1948 edition of *Optometry: Professional, Economic, and Legal Aspects* that, "... a comprehensive study

of the worldwide status of ophthalmic practices has not been made.”¹ Among the causative factors he cited were: language difficulties, differences in governmental regulations, lack of official statistical studies, lack of knowledge among lay people concerning ophthalmic practices, and lack of organization among ophthalmic practitioners. Thirty years later, he lamented the continuing dearth of information on optometry’s international profile by referencing the virtual omission of optometry documents in the files of the World Health Organization (which is interesting considering that the WHO theme for the 1976 World Health Day was “Foresight Prevents Blindness”). He suggested that, “Perhaps the best immediate source of information is that obtained from optometrists who have traveled abroad, and that obtained from correspondence with optometrists practicing in foreign countries.”¹⁰ He used his first sabbatical from 1959 to 1960 to travel to Europe and Africa. In South Africa, alone, he reportedly made personal contact with over 200 practicing optometrists and visited at least 100 private practices.¹⁰

Professor Hofstetter continued to travel abroad on numerous occasions throughout his career to expand his observation and knowledge of optometric education and practice in different countries. Between 1961 and 1977 he published reports on the status of optometry in South Africa¹¹⁻¹⁵, India¹⁶, Singapore¹⁷, New Zealand¹⁸, Thailand¹⁹, Australia²⁰, Hong Kong²¹, the Philippines²², Austria²³, Belgium²⁴, Denmark²⁵, East Germany²⁶, Finland²⁷, France²⁸, Italy²⁹, the Netherlands³⁰, Norway³¹, Sweden³², Switzerland³³ and West Germany.³⁴ The methodical appearance of Professor Hofstetter’s travelogues in the ophthalmic literature helped fill the void in the depth and breadth of information about optometry on foreign lands. For example, according to Claro Cinco, past president of the International Federation of Asian and Pacific Associations of Optometrists (Asia Pacific Council of Optometry), the first published reference to Filipino optometry outside the Philippines was in 1948 when Professor Hofstetter included a paragraph about the optometry course at Centro Escolar University (Manila) in *Optometry: Professional, Economic, and Legal Aspects*.³⁵ “Otherwise,” Cinco writes, “optometry in the Philippines was unknown abroad.” This was in spite of the fact that Filipino optometrists organized as early as 1917 under the banner of the Philippine Association of Optometrists, followed by reorganizations as the Philippine Optometric Association in 1932 and the Optometric Association of the Philippines in 1936.³⁶

Professor Hofstetter’s travels not only contributed to a better understanding of optometry internationally, but also

they advanced and nurtured professional and personal friendships with a widely diverse population of international colleagues. As a frequent delegate and member of the executive committee of the International Optometric and Optical League (World Council of Optometry), his advice was sought regularly either in person or through correspondence with practitioners and educators from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia and Asia – virtually from around the world. Whether he was advising someone in Turkey on the professional aspects of optometry or commenting on vision care practices in Brazil, his counsel was welcomed and respected. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Professor Henry Hofstetter and Professor Edwin Marshall (International Optometric and Optical League, Nagoya, Japan, 1980)

When Professor Hofstetter was chair of the American Optometric Association Committee on International Affairs—six years after his 1968-1969 tenure as the first academic to be installed as AOA president—he was the recognized U.S. spokesperson on international optometry. He struggled to adapt what he described as the net annual expenditure of “zero plus zero dollars” (combining the expenditures of the American Academy of Optometry with those of the American Optometric Association) toward increasing U.S. optometry’s official engagement in international activities.¹⁰ In the 1977 article he penned for the *American Journal of Optometry and Physiological Optics* he asked the question, “Is internationalism an optometric issue?” He responded to his question in the affirmative as it being “the most critical issue on the optometric horizon,” while at the same time noting little evidence of U.S. influence internationally.¹⁰

“I point out our virtual nonparticipation in optometry elsewhere only to make it crystal clear that we can in no way

lay legitimate claim to having served in a contributory role to the advancement of optometry in other countries.

"I should like to express a special concern for our present inadequacy to cope with internationalism as an optometric issue even if it were decided in leadership circles or by formal resolution that we should do so. At the moment we in optometry are almost completely devoid of both the inclination and the capabilities."

Professor Hofstetter's 1977 comments were not reflective of his personal inclination and capabilities. As early as 1954, he theorized in an editorial for *Optometric World* that optometry is international and in a second editorial a year later he discussed international relations in optometry.^{37,38} He was an exemplar for what needed to be done. When Indian Optometric Association past president O.P. Malik visited Professor Hofstetter at Indiana University during the early 1970s, Hofstetter committed to sending two U.S. faculty members – one from Indiana University and one from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry – to India to conduct India's first attempt at continuing optometric education on an international scale.³⁹ Along with Dr. Satya Verma of the Pennsylvania College of Optometry, Professor Hofstetter worked with the Indian Optometric Association and the Delhi Opticians Association to develop the first Indo-American Course of Optometry. The multi-week course took place in New Delhi with the Division of Optometry at Indiana University as its U.S. collaborator. It included basic instruction and assessment in optometric theory and practice and the awarding of certificates of completion from Indiana University. A report published by the two U.S. educators demonstrated support for Professor Hofstetter's beliefs regarding international optometry, indicating that, "It would be a step in improving optometry on an international basis if Americans would give of their experience, their talents and some of their material abundance to those struggling leaders in that vast subcontinent where optometrists tread a path so familiar to many an American O.D."⁴⁰

Professor Hofstetter was a remarkable educator. His contributions to the advancement of optometric education in the United States are well-noted. However, he may have been a more significant instrument of optometric education outside the country. His personal consultations and prolific literature submissions helped create paths to the continued development of the profession and the expansion of programs and schools worldwide. He instructed on the objectives in optometric education for the *Australian Journal of Optometry*,⁴¹ provided guidance on optometry in the 21st century for the *South African Optometrist*,⁴² offered insight into optometric education and

optometry curriculum patterns in Europe for students of the *American Journal of Optometry and Physiological Optics* and *The Ophthalmic Optician*,^{43,44} discussed international uniformity of professional objectives in⁴⁵ and developed for the International Optometric and Optical League brochures addressing the establishment of new university-level optometry schools and programs of study for university-level degrees in optometry.^{46,47} When the South African Optometric Association was looking for answers about the quality of optometric education in South Africa, it turned to Henry Hofstetter. In his published Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Optometric Education in South Africa to the South African Optometric Association, Hofstetter advised the South African optometric community on the structure and function of optometric education in the country with his usual candor and constructive commentary.⁴⁸ Other published works reflected on the establishment of schools of optometry in Japan,⁴⁹ South Africa,⁵⁰⁻⁵² Puerto Rico⁵³ and Poland.⁵⁴ Years after stepping down as the founding director of the Indiana University Division of Optometry, Professor Hofstetter signed on as acting dean to help jump start the academic program at the new Escuela de Optometría de la Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico (Inter American University of Puerto Rico School of Optometry).

Optometric leaders from other countries frequently came to Indiana University to confer with Professor Hofstetter on academic matters and to gain first-hand knowledge of U.S. optometry. With his guidance, they sat in on optometry classes and faculty meetings as observers in residence. Visits by Japan Optometric Association and All Japan Optometric Cooperative past President Fumio Morie (and later his son Issei Morie), helped shape plans for the founding and programmatic refinement of the Kikuchi College of Optometry in Nagoya. Filipino optometrist and esteemed Asia Pacific leader Claro Cinco founded the Cebu Doctors' College of Optometry in the Philippines on the curricular platform he learned and experienced during his visits with Professor Hofstetter at Indiana University. Other international leaders who particularly were inspired by the wisdom and guidance of Professor Hofstetter include Svein Hommerstad of Norway, Peter Gunkel and Theo Gumpelmayer of Germany, Per Soderberg of Sweden, David Pickwell of the U.K., Damien Smith of Australia, I.K.O.K. Kragha of Nigeria and Lionel Rose of Israel.

Professor Hofstetter also mentored a cadre of western-trained optometrists who he inspired to positions of international leadership. Many of them helped establish and/or administer optometric programs in Nigeria, Israel, Poland and Sri Lanka (William Baldwin), South Africa (Douglas

Penisten and Michael Cook) and Hong Kong (George Woo). Professor George Woo, who was dean of the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, commented that Professor Hofstetter was “a familiar figure” in Asia and by “taking the Hong Kong Optometric Association under his wing, he helped to instill in us the principles of professional education and training.”⁵⁵ Professor Woo credited Professor Hofstetter’s advice and encouragement as part of the energy behind the early beginnings of the program in optometry at what is now The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. As a special tribute to his shared vision for optometry in Asia, Professor Hofstetter was invited to give the inaugural K.B. Woo Memorial Lecture at the 9th Asia Pacific Optometric Congress in Hong Kong. His wealth of collegial relationships around the world underwrote

Figure 2: Issei Morie, Edwin Marshall, Henry Hofstetter, Lionel Rose (International Optometric and Optical League, Nagoya, Japan, 1980)

much of the vision, development and growth of optometry internationally.

In addition to being a great educator, administrator, researcher and mentor, Professor Hofstetter also was a great communicator. International audiences were no exception. He was known to be reflective and measured, but he also had a witty side. He could shift gears to accommodate the uniqueness of the situation, going from the persona of a pragmatic educator and consultant to a culturally tuned-in humorist. At a dinner party in Nagoya, Japan he willfully volunteered to represent the U.S. delegation during the evening’s entertainment. The witty professor comfortably performed stand-up comedy with an international twist in front of and to the delight of an audience of invited guests from the International Optometric and Optical League. (Figure 2)

The National Optometry Hall of Fame international

icon was known and revered throughout the optometric universe as the optometric ambassador to the world. At the Henry Hofstetter Symposium conducted by the Section on Optometric Education at the 1992 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Optometry, colleagues and former students convened in Orlando, Florida to honor the breadth of Professor Hofstetter’s influence on the foundation and evolutionary course of international optometry and global optometric education. Professor Lyle of the School of Optometry at the University of Waterloo expressed the collective observation that, “Henry Hofstetter stands tall in Optometry: from Poland to South Africa, from Australia to North America he is known as a leader.”⁵⁶

Seven years later at The Hofstetter Symposium on International Optometry and Vision Care, sponsored by the Indiana University School of Optometry and the World Council of Optometry, optometric leaders from around the globe came to Bloomington, Indiana to celebrate and pay tribute to Professor Hofstetter’s decades of outstanding contributions to optometric education and vision care around the world. He was presented with a bound volume of well-wishing and congratulatory letters from friends, colleagues and other leaders in the world of optometry and vision science whose lives he impacted. The formal program included talks by colleagues from Australia, Poland, Germany, Canada and the United States. As part of the ceremony and in recognition of his effect on the envisioning and framing of a worldwide lens for optometry, Professor Hofstetter was presented the first Distinguished Service Award from the World Council of Optometry (WCO). In presenting the award, WCO president Manfred Müller commented that Professor Hofstetter “has changed the path of our profession and, in so doing, has forged a new global frontier for optometry.”⁵⁷

The name of Henry Hofstetter is synonymous with international optometry. The tentacles of his legacy in optometry extend to the far corners of the world. It is very fitting that as a co-founder of the Optometric Historical Society and on its 50th anniversary, he is uniquely visible in memoriam as the elder statesman of organized optometry in both the United States and abroad. Svein Hommerstad, a cherished colleague and friend of Professor Hofstetter, commented on receiving word of Professor Hofstetter’s death, “It is a loss for international optometry, but we should however be thankful for all the years he and Jane have used for the benefit of international optometry.”⁵⁸

Professor Hofstetter was truly a visionary in world optometry. His iconic presence in the historical annals of the optometric profession “stands tall” today, as it will in the future generations of optometrists worldwide.

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