PROFESSOR HENRY W. HOFSTETTER – MEMORIES OF HIS FIRST VISIT IN POLAND

Bolesław Kędzia, PhD

Founding Chairman, Department of Optometry
Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences
Poland

lbkedzia@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Personal memoir describing Optometric Historical Society founder Henry W Hofstetter, O.D., Ph.D.'s visit to Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences (KMUMS) in Poznan, Poland in 1984. The author discusses Hofstetter's impact on their research on ocular emmetropia/ametropia and on the curriculum and pedagogy of founders of KMUMS' Department of Optometry.

KEYWORDS

international optometry; optometry education; Optometric Historical Society; optometry history; Poland

In 1984, shortly after the end of martial law in Poland, Professor Henry W. Hofstetter accepted an invitation to visit Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences (KMUMS) in Poznań, Poland. He came to us covering the travel costs himself, because at that time the University was able to provide only his accommodation costs. This was his first visit to the homeland of the famous scientist Vitello, about whom he wrote many years before in his 1948 book *Optometry*¹: "Just before the light of the Renaissance brought a new day to the world, man put on his spectacles. It could hardly have been earlier, for Vitello, a Polish scientist and the first European man of science to write a book on optics, made no mention whatsoever of spectacles, although his book included more than 400 pages on optics and laws of perspective. The book was written in 1270."

Poland has had a long history of important work in optics and optometry. For example, it is worth noting that the epoch-making work of professor of physiology at Utrecht University, F. C. Donders (1819-1889), *On the Anomalies of Accommodation and Refraction of the Eye* (1864), was translated (B. Gepner)² into Polish in 1876. In 1863, a year before Donders' book was published, Professor Dr. Josef Majer (1808-1899), physiologist and the president of Jagiellonian University, the oldest university in Poland (1364), published in four consecutive issues of the *Review of Medicine* the paper "Contributions to Optometry." The paper begins with a series of questions, in which the author talks about the process of

seeing. He points to the visual process as being the main focus of optometry, along with connections of optometry with physiology and with optics.

About a year before Hofstetter's visit, a small, several-person Optometry Department was established at the medical school of KMUMS. The ambition of people in the department was to introduce an optometry education program on the university level into the Polish education system. The knowledge we received from Professor Hofstetter, based on his vast experience and deep understanding of the essence of optometry, was difficult to overestimate, especially as we were at the beginning of our effort. He began with an explanation of the education system in the U.S., which in fact differed from ours at the time in its concept, especially at the university level. We were most interested in the philosophy of professional education of optometrists. He emphasized the necessity of broad inclusion in the curriculum of practical classes with the participation of real patients. The concept was very close to the method of educating dentists at our school of medicine. When we were preparing to develop the curriculum, Professor Hofstetter warned against attempting to take over areas that belong to other disciplines. He stressed this again in the article,³ which he wrote especially for the first issue of our journal which was established eight years later.

Professor Hofstetter also visited the Ministry of Health in Warsaw, where he met with the directors of the medical

education department. He explained what optometry is and what optometrists were doing. Professor Hofstetter indicated the desirability of introducing the optometric profession into the health care system in Poland. He emphasized that the benefits of the system, also economic, are the greatest when optometrists are independent first contact specialists in eye care. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to legally regulate the status of an optometrist. He strongly encouraged introducing the profession to Poland and that preparation of the relevant law should be the starting point. He explained that such legal regulation is a condition for entry into the profession of only people with knowledge and skills at the expected level. This, in turn, forces the introduction of adequate university-level professional education as well as independent verification of the professional ability of graduates.

Currently, efforts supported by Professor Hofstetter have born fruit in curricula at six Polish universities. In the Act⁴ containing the Classification of Occupations and Specialties accepted in Poland, the profession of optometry is recorded, that is, the profession is performed legally in Poland. Unfortunately, so far, there is no law regulating its performance in the form that Hofstetter recommended almost 40 years ago. Due to this lack, the curricula realized in different Polish universities are not fully compatible, when comparing content and level. So Professor Hofstetter's advice does not lose its relevance.

At the end of the 1980s, William R. Baldwin, O.D., Ph.D., the Dean of the College of Optometry at the University of Houston, came to our University. He met with the president of KMUMS, the dean of the school of medicine and other university officials. After the visit he together with Professor Hofstetter and Richard Paskowski, O.D., began a fundraiser in the U.S. to start construction of a building for our optometry department to help create conditions for the start of an educational program. These funds enabled the commencement of construction in 1989; continuation and its completion were carried out with funds from the KMUMS.

At the end I offer a few words of personal observation. During his stay in Poland, Professor Hofstetter also devoted a lot of time to talk with me about my research interests. At that time, I was working on the concept of classifying ocular emmetropia/ametropia based on the basic function of the visual system, i.e. on receiving and transmitting information, not on the principles of optics. These resulted in my formulation of the *informeffia* (in the form most efficient – in receiving information) criterion of the visual system. Its consequence is that correction procedures

generally are designed to alter an existing *aformeffic* status of the visual system toward artificial *informeffia* and that the quantity of information can allow the comparison of the efficiency of different correction procedures. His comments and encouragement to develop this idea made me dare to present the results of my work in an article which, following his advice, I sent to the *American Journal of Optometry and Physiological Optics*, where it was published⁵ in 1986.

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