

The Ophthalmologist and the Optician

The fitting of Contact Lenses by the trained qualified optician or contact lens technician on prescription and supervision of the ophthalmologist is a subject which is currently controversial, not only, because of the lack of understanding of the legal and professional responsibilities involved, but also, because of organized, militant legislative and court actions to restrain the optician in this area. In the June 1964 issue of American Journal of Optometry, (page 394), the so called American Optometric Association White Paper on Contact Lenses states, quote "Optometrists form the only profession which possesses legal authorization and formal academic training to fit contact lenses" end of quote. This rather euphoric and completely irresponsible and erroneous statement points up the Contact Lens problem confronting Medicine and Opticianry.

We know and understand the age old importance of the physician-patient-relationship in the practice of medicine, but there is much to learn and understand about relationship of physician and allied ancillary personnel in the practice of ophthalmology, particularly in the field of Contact Lens fitting.

The opinions that I will present to you do not necessarily reflect the views of ophthalmologists generally nor are they at variance with the views of these men. Agreement or

disagreement with these opinions I believe, will depend chiefly, on the technical facilities available, and the medical needs of the specific area in which the ophthalmologist is practicing—the determining basic philosophy being "Whatever is done should always be in the patient's best interest".

At present there are 11 states (Delaware, Michigan, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico, Indiana, New Jersey, Oregon, Iowa and Texas) forbidding contact lens work by opticians—prohibited by court decision or interpretation of optometric laws by the State Attorney General (Iowa and Texas). In some of these states however the prohibitions are not enforced (e.g. Indiana). On the other hand there are 10 states in which contact lens fitting is legally permitted (Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Hawaii, Nevada, Washington, Rhode Island and Virginia). In New York State, Contact Lens fitting can only be performed by the optician technician in the presence of the ophthalmologist.

There are approximately 4700 certified ophthalmologists practicing in the U.S.A. This number is increased to somewhat over 8000 when you add the group of well trained physicians treating the eye, but not certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology. It becomes apparent at once, therefore, that these physicians