

ATTACHMENT No. 3

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**THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONS AND GOVERNMENT—VISION CARE OF CHILDREN IN
A COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH PROGRAM**

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A comprehensive program for the health of children must include vision care. In today's visually oriented world, it hardly seems necessary to point out the intimate relationships that exist between vision and school achievement, vision and social development, vision and safety, vision and adjustment, vision and recreation, vision and health. Many activities of the child, his opportunities as well as his achievement, his health as well as his welfare, are related to the widening circles of influence generated by an uncorrected vision problem. A refractive error impedes development of the visual skills needed for reading while the impairment in reading skills leads to educational and social problems that restrict opportunity. Of course, vision neither operates by itself nor accounts for all the characteristics of the child, but it does play a definite and important role in the performance and health of the child.

The importance of vision care for children is attested to by the many state laws that require vision testing in the schools; the public and private programs for the detection of certain vision problems (e.g., amblyopia); the large body of research on the relation between vision problems and school achievement (e.g., reading); the major efforts for the rehabilitation of the visually handicapped, the partially seeing, and the brain injured child; the studies of epidemiological and sociological factors related to vision problems; and research on the relation between chronic disease, acute disease, physical development, sensory performance (including vision), and scholastic achievement. The evidence is overwhelming that a significant proportion of children have vision problems, many undetected, that interfere with their health and performance; and that almost all of these vision problems can be corrected or compensated for using available techniques and knowledge.

As the child grows and develops, vision problems change and new problems appear, thus requiring a continuing program of surveillance and care until the visual system attains a stable maturity in the third decade.

Eye disease occurs only rarely in children, but requires close supervision. Organic problems, including congenital, chronic and episodic disease, general health and nutrition problems, as well as emotional problems and stress, all influence the vision performance of children and require a coordinated, comprehensive and continuing program of care.

Vision care is an important part of any health program for children. Vision problems occur in a significant proportion of children, many undetected, and can be corrected with established techniques and knowledge. Vision care should be part of a coordinated, comprehensive, and continuing program of health care for children.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Vision problems occur with statistically predictable frequency in children. These problems, when present, influence the development, adjustment, and achievement of the child. Vision problems change and new problems appear as the child grows and develops through the adolescent years. The pressure of vision-centered activities of school, recreation, and, later, driving and employment make it imperative to discover vision problems as expeditiously as possible. Not until the end of the teens, when the visual system attains a relatively stable maturity, can we relax this constant vigilance.

Most measurements of vision are continuous variables (with the obvious exception of organic problems). Visual acuity measurements, for example, vary continuously from total blindness to 20/10 with the peak of the acuity distribution dependent on the age and level of eye care of the population group. Significant vision problems represent departures from the mean or normal value. To determine whether a departure from normality is significant is not a simple technical process, but requires professional judgment and a careful evaluation, in each individual case, of the importance of the deviation and its interrelation to the other measurements of vision performance in that child.

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