The Impact of Federal Service Optometry
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The Impact of Federal Service Optometry on the Profession: An Historical Perspective

Relevant Financial Relationships
NONE.

World War I

• During WW I, the profession was in its infancy
• Education varied from university degrees to apprenticeships
• Many states did not yet have licensure

World War I

• Prior to WW I, there was a small standing Army. Entry was limited to those with good uncorrected VA
• When manpower was increased to meet to war demand, this was no longer the case
• No recognition of the profession by the military, though many optometrists served in unofficial basis

At the conclusion of WW I, the military was dramatically decreased and ametropia was no longer a concern
Interwar Years
- By the beginning of WW II, the profession had matured considerably
- Creation of the American Academy of Optometry in 1922
- Education more standardized
- Licensure in all states

World War II
- As WW II began, the need for soldiers and sailors, even with poor uncorrected VA, again dramatically increased
- Still no career ladder for optometrists in the Army
- Not recognized as a profession
- Served as enlisted men, not commissioned officers.

World War II
- Optometrists in the Navy were commissioned beginning in 1941.
- First recognition by the federal government as a profession.
- Again, at the conclusion of the war, the military was dramatically decreased

Cold War
- As of 1947, due to the efforts of the AOA, Army optometrists were now commissioned, as were those in the newly formed Air Force
Cold War
• ODs were now part of the health care system, not operating in isolation
• First time ODs practicing within hospitals
• First time ODs credentialed
• First time (on an unofficial basis) that ODs used pharmaceutical agents

Cold War
• At the conclusion of the war there was again a major decrease in manpower, but not in optometry
• Due to the manpower needs of the Cold War optometric numbers were actually increased

Korean War
• With the outbreak of the Korean War there was a massive manpower build up again
• ODs served throughout the war as recognized professionals

Vietnam War
• At the beginning of the Vietnam War there was again a large build up in overall manpower
• Optometrists were included in the “Doctors’ Draft”
• Optometrists were assigned to combat divisions
• Provided greater direct support to the mission than ever before

Scope of Practice
• Originally, optometrists were specifically forbidden from using Diagnostic Pharmaceutical Agents (DPAs) or Therapeutic Pharmaceutical Agents (TPAs)
• Often done unofficially, “under medical supervision” or “exception to policy”

Scope of Practice
• ODs gained experience and knowledge of the benefits of pharmaceutical utilization
• Impetus for the movement to use these agents in the civilian world
• This experience was used to argue safety and benefits in state legislatures
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Scope of Practice
• Regulations gradually modified in the 1980s to officially allow the use of DPAs and TPAs in all branches of the military.
• Sometimes initially used a formulary of anesthetics, mydriatics, cycloplegics, anti-infectives, steroids, analgesics, etc.
• Required change in credentialing

Operation Desert Shield/Storm, Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom
• Conflicts again lead to a manpower buildup, primarily through mobilizing the reserve forces, including many optometrists.
• ODs again in combat divisions and other forward elements proved their importance in achieving the mission.
• Provided medical eyecare in addition to traditional optometric care.

Humanitarian Missions
• From the Vietnam War to present.
• Broad scope of medical and traditional optometric services.

Operation Desert Shield/Storm, Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom

Veterans Administration
• Optometrists were first placed on the staff of Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals in 1947.
• In 1973, Public Law created a position for a full-time Director of Optometry within the Department of Medicine and Surgery.
• The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Optometry Service was created by Public Law on October 21, 1976 with the establishment of the Director of Optometric Service position.

Veterans Administration
• VA is the largest healthcare education organization in the U.S.
• Optometry students began training in the VA in 1972.
• Morbidity of patient base is ideal for education of students and residents on ocular disease.
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Public Health Service

- Dr. Paul Owen, First USPHS OD
- 1966
- PHS Indian Hospital, Phoenix, AZ
- Effort to combat trachoma
- Grew to 100 Commissioned ODs plus additional contractors

Summary

- Federal Service Optometry's Impact on the Profession
  - First hospital-based care
  - First multidisciplinary practice
  - First credentialing
  - First exposure to medical eye care

For additional information: