

**Recommended Curriculum
For The Teaching of
Professionalism and Ethics
in Optometry**

Optometric Ethics Educators Committee

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The theme for the 1995-96 AOA year is “Conquering Challenges, Creating Successes.” It is a reminder that there is never a smooth, easy road to success, whether in private optometric practice or in the activities of the American Optometric Association. To do our jobs effectively, we must constantly seek and assimilate new information related to our ever expanding scope of practice. We must always be cognizant of the changing social, cultural, and economic trends that affect the citizens of our nation.

Our primary professional objective is to provide quality care to our patients in an ever changing environment. We must challenge ourselves to continuously strive for ethical behavior that supports this objective. Our profession has a strong history of commitment to professional ethics. Our profession has had a formal code of ethics almost since its inception. In 1994 in Minneapolis, the House of Delegates celebrated the 50th anniversary of our current code of ethics. With the encouragement and guidance of Dr. Alden N. Haffner, the House of Delegates established the AOA Ethics and Values of Optometric Care and Services Committee in 1991. This committee strives to raise consciousness about issues of ethical behavior, to identify and address ethical concerns related to the practice of optometry, and to identify and address ethical concerns that relate to organizational behavior.

An understanding of the ethical principles which direct appropriate behavior is essential. Knowing a process for analyzing possible actions when we face ethical issues or dilemmas is imperative. It is important that optometry students be given these ethical tools and skills in order to solve ethical concerns in much the same way they should be given the latest technology, skills, and knowledge to manage eye and vision problems. The American Optometric Association is proud to have had the opportunity to sponsor the ad hoc Optometric Ethics Educators Committee as it has worked to develop a recommended curriculum for the teaching of professionalism and ethics in the schools and colleges of optometry. The Ethics and Values Committee of the AOA provided administrative and travel support, made possible by a most generous grant from CIBA Vision Corporation, for the last two meetings of the optometric ethics educators..

We must do all we can to help optometry embrace the changes in our world and to bring the dynamics of ethical decision-making to all aspects of our profession.

Sincerely,



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The Ethics and Values Committee of the American Optometric Association is proud to have had the opportunity to provide administrative support to the ad hoc Optometric Ethics Educators Committee for their final two meetings to develop a recommended curriculum in the areas of ethics and professionalism. We want to acknowledge and give a special thanks to CIBA Vision Corporation for the generous financial support given to the American Optometric Association for the purpose of assisting this effort by the optometric ethics educators. This funding enabled the participation of representatives from seventeen of the nineteen optometric academic institutions in North America. Dr. Sally M. Dillehay, Manager of Academic Development for CIBA Vision Corporation, represented CIBA Vision Corporation at these two meetings of the Optometric Ethics Educators Committee.

Administrative assistance from the AOA Ethics and Values Committee staff, Leon Carslick and Thomas E. Eichhorst, J.D., contributed greatly to the successful organization of these meetings. The active participation during the final meeting of Dr. Stephen C. Miller, Director of the AOA Clinical Care Center, was of significant value.

Instruction of our future optometric colleagues in the nature of professionalism and in the theories and practice of ethical decision-making will encourage continuing professional behavior within the profession of optometry.

AOA Ethics and Values Committee (1995-96):

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As part of our ongoing commitment to excellence in education, CIBA Vision is proud to support the American Optometric Association and the ad hoc Optometric Ethics Educators Committee in the development of an Ethics and Professionalism curriculum.

In the ever-changing ophthalmic marketplace, the role of ethics and professionalism continues to increase in importance. Identification and discussion of the related challenges and opportunities will serve to move the optometric profession forward into the next century. Tomorrow's Doctors of Optometry will need to focus more keenly than ever on the areas of professionalism and ethics to stay competitive in the health care field.

CIBA Vision is honored to have been a part of this most important venture.

Best wishes as you successfully implement the Ethics and Professionalism curriculum.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "RE Weisbarth".

Richard E. Weisbarth, O.D., F.A.A.O.
Executive Director, Professional Services

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally M Dillehay".

Sally M. Dillehay, O.D., M.S., F.A.A.O.
Manager, Academic Development

BACKGROUND

The idea of an ethics curriculum for optometry was initially conceived at the last day of an American Academy of Optometry Meeting in Columbus, Ohio, in 1988. The meeting hall was being prepared for their next group and I noticed a sign announcing a lecture entitled "Ethics in Agriculture." A colleague and I were struck with the stark contrast to the lack of papers on ethics at our meeting. A literature search revealed a paucity of publications in optometry concerning ethics and ethics education. The Candidate's Guide for the examination of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry listed only 1 or 2 items under the heading of "Ethical Considerations."

In order to quantify the extent of ethics education taking place in optometry I sent a questionnaire to all of the ASCO member institutions. The results were published in the Fall 1993 issue of the Journal of Optometric Education. This report provided the catalyst for the profession, and particularly its schools, to "do something" concerning the teaching of ethics. Optometry is a mainstream health care profession, and the public has every right to expect that doctors have been taught the moral skills necessary to function in the complex contemporary world. The same public that licenses optometry would also expect the optometric profession to assess the quality of the teaching and learning of ethics among its newest members.

Initially, a group of interested optometric ethics educators met on two separate occasions in St. Louis to begin the process of developing a curriculum for the teaching of ethics. During these and subsequent meetings we benefited from support services provided by Mr. Thomas Eichhorst and Mr. Leon Carslick of the American Optometric Association staff. At the third meeting, Bruce Weinstein, Ph.D., a noted author and an ethics educator who developed an ethics curriculum in dentistry, helped to direct and focus our discussions.

The fourth and final meeting was held in St. Louis in February 1996. The Recommended Curriculum For The Teaching of Professionalism and Ethics in Optometry resulted from that meeting.

The curriculum materials are not intended to be used in a "cookbook" fashion, but rather designed to work with materials already taught and/or in courses already programmed. This allows for the inclusion of ethics as a specific comprehensive course, or as individual topics integrated into other courses during the four professional years. This concept is further explained under the heading of "Implementation" within the Curriculum document. We have intentionally included more detail under the heading of "Ethics" because for some schools it represents some unique materials.

This curriculum was the work of a committee and its success is reflected in its participation. The names of all involved are included to be recognized for their contributions. (The optometric ethics educators also assisted me in the development of the following "Bibliography.")

D. Leonard Werner, O.D., Chair
Optometric Ethics Educators Committee

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The following are listed for the convenience of the instructor. Clearly this is not a listing of the universe of ethics literature that may be applicable for optometry, but could serve as a guide for instructors.

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CODE of ETHICS

*It Shall Be the Ideal, the Resolve, and the Duty of the
Members of The American Optometric Association*



- TO KEEP** *the visual welfare of the patient uppermost at all times;*
- TO PROMOTE** *in every possible way, in collaboration with this Association, better care of the visual needs of mankind;*
- TO ENHANCE** *continuously their educational and technical proficiency to the end that their patients shall receive the benefits of all acknowledged improvements in visual care;*
- TO SEE THAT** *no person shall lack for visual care, regardless of his financial status;*
- TO ADVISE** *the patient whenever consultation with an optometric colleague or reference for other professional care seems advisable;*
- TO HOLD** *in professional confidence all information concerning a patient and to use such data only for the benefit of the patient;*
- TO CONDUCT** *themselves as exemplary citizens;*
- TO MAINTAIN** *their offices and their practices in keeping with professional standards;*
- TO PROMOTE** *and maintain cordial and unselfish relationships with members of their own profession and of other professions for the exchange of information to the advantage of mankind.*



American Optometric
Association

Recommended Curriculum For The Teaching Of Professionalism And Ethics In Optometry

There is a growing interest among health care professional schools to include an ethics component in their core curriculum. In addition, the ethical demands upon optometry have been greatly increased by changes in the scope of optometry, alterations in the traditional modes of health care delivery, increased complexity in the methods of reimbursement, and developing national trends toward managed care. All of these factors indicate a need to revise the ethics curriculum in the schools and colleges of optometry.

The goals of an optometry ethics curriculum are to enable graduates to recognize, critically analyze, and resolve the ethical issues that may arise in the practice of optometry. Ethics should be treated as a reasoned discipline in its own right and not simply as either abstract goodheartedness or unquestioning devotion to codes of conduct. The curriculum must be structured so as to enable students to deal with new and emerging ethical issues. In addition, the moral basis of the contract between health care professionals, their patients, and society must be clearly drawn. The sources of morality are many and diverse, including religion, the family, education, customs, traditions, history, and the law. Pluralism may be bridged by ethical thinking, which hopefully will lead to clear, consistent, coherent guides to moral behavior.

The major purpose of including ethics in the optometry curriculum is to promote ethical and professional behavior. Such behavior addresses the interests of patients and society first, likewise serving the interests of the professional. This behavior may be fostered by treating ethics as a rigorous intellectual discipline.

Professionalism in optometry includes adherence to the standards of acceptable professional behavior and possession of the virtues to which the professional should aspire. Studying the evolution of optometry as a profession helps the student to understand the environment within which these standards and virtues have developed.

The optometry ethics curriculum should not be strictly theoretical, but should be based on the analysis of cases oriented to the delivery of health care and to the practice of optometry. This case-oriented approach permits ethical theories and principles to be put into useful practice and encourages the development and use of critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the ethics components of health care delivery must be taught and reinforced throughout the optometric curriculum, particularly in the clinical settings.

Educational Goal

The curriculum for professionalism and ethics should develop decision-making skills that will contribute to students' ethical behavior and deepen their understanding of the moral dimensions of the practice of optometry. It should promote students' understanding of and commitment to incorporating the ideals of the optometric profession into all aspects of the practice of optometry, especially as they concern patient care.

Behavioral Objectives

As a result of the curriculum for professionalism and ethics, students will be able to demonstrate a working knowledge of the principles of ethical reasoning and its application to the practice of optometry, consistent with the ideals of the profession.

An Outline of the Core Content of the Recommended Curriculum in Professionalism and Ethics

I. The Optometric Profession and Professionalism

A. Background Issues

1. Definitions - profession, professionalism
2. Profession compared to trade
3. Social, public & community responsibilities of a professional

B. The Evolution of Ethics in Health Care

1. The Hippocratic Oath (between 5th and 4th Centuries BCE)
2. The evolution of standards of professional behavior from the period of Hippocrates to the present period.
3. Technology, patients' rights, and modern bioethics

C. The History of Professionalism in Optometry

1. The history of the profession of optometry
2. The history of ethics within the profession of optometry
3. The role of local, state, and national optometric professional organizations
4. Introduction to the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Conduct of the American Optometric Association
5. The Optometric Oath

D. The regulation of Optometry

1. Legislative
2. Administrative agencies
3. Judicial

II. Ethics

A. Background Issues

1. Definitions - ethics, professional ethics
2. Why study professional ethics?
3. Distinguishing ethics from law and religion
4. Ethical judgments: objectivity and relativism

B. Ethical Theory

1. Making ethical judgments: Appealing to consequences (teleological) or duties (deontological)?
2. Ethical principles
 - a. autonomy
 - b. nonmaleficence
 - c. beneficence
 - d. justice
3. Interaction of principles in ethical decision-making
 - a. beneficence (paternalism) vs. autonomy
 - b. rights and duties
 - c. distributive justice
4. Virtues in health care (compassion, honesty, integrity, , etc.)

C. Applied Ethics

(The ethical doctor)

1. Responsibilities to patients
 - a. truth-telling
 - b. confidentiality
 - c. informed consent
 - d. maintaining competence
 - d. fiduciary responsibilities
2. Responsibilities to colleagues
3. Responsibilities to society

D. Ethical Analysis of Codes of Ethics

E. Framework for Ethical Decision-Making

(Moral reasoning/Critical thinking)

1. Identify the ethical issue(s) or dilemma(s)
2. Identify the morally relevant facts
3. What moral principles/ethical codes are involved?
4. List possible actions (What could you do?)
5. List possible outcomes from possible actions
6. Which action is best supported? (What should you do?)

F. Case Studies/Applications

Guidelines For Implementation

Professional behavior and ethics are interrelated. Ethics is the route through which professionalism becomes understandable, relevant, and practical. The topics of professionalism and ethics should be introduced early in optometric education and reinforced throughout all four years of the professional program.

Those elements related to the nature of professions in general and to the profession of optometry in particular (I. Professionalism and The Optometric Profession) may be presented best during the beginning of the professional program, primarily in a lecture format. The use of classroom discussion when feasible should enhance the instruction in professionalism.

Similarly, the basic elements related to ethical theory, principles of ethics, and the process of ethical decision-making (II. Ethics) should also be introduced during the pre-clinical didactic-course period. A lecture/discussion format is effective. Use of case studies for classroom discussion during the study of ethical theory and principles reinforce students' understanding of their application. The process of ethical decision-making is best taught by actively engaging the students in an interactive fashion, with an emphasis on the analysis of cases presenting ethical issues or ethical dilemmas. Video and computer simulation formats could also be utilized.

The enhancement of ethical decision-making skills should take place within the classroom and throughout the clinics. Ongoing practice in the process of ethical decision-making will be required if this skill is to be mastered and internalized. Including a number of *small-group* ethics rounds or seminars during the clinical years is typically effective. These ethics rounds enhance ethical decision-making skills through the discussion of case studies that present common ethical issues and dilemmas from optometric practice. Discussion of specific cases encountered by student clinicians is beneficial in preparing students to reflect critically on their own practice.

The elements of the above outline of the core content of the recommended curriculum in professionalism and ethics may be presented entirely within one course or divided among several courses within the professional program. Consideration was given to the order of presentation of the various topics; however, it is understood that this order could be adjusted to fit a school or college's needs without seriously affecting the quality of the curriculum. The outline of the core content of the recommended curriculum does not presume to list all of the important topics in professionalism and ethics. Each school and college should consider adding those elements they consider important for their professional program.

The study of ethics should be incorporated into all courses within the professional curriculum whenever possible. For the ethics curriculum to be most effective, each faculty member should understand basic ethical principles and the process of ethical decision-making, and be committed to their implementation. There are many ethical issues, apart

from patient care concerns, encountered by students within both the classroom and the clinic which demand attention. Also, ethical concerns surrounding research, publication, and presentation issues should be addressed within the appropriate courses identified by the faculty of each school and college. Effective education relating to patient care requires the full cooperation of clinical faculty, who must reinforce good ethical behavior in patient care in both their formal teaching and individual interaction with patients, students, and support staff.

Faculty commitment is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the ethics education process. Therefore, faculty development is an essential component of the optometric ethics curriculum. In addition to well trained optometric ethics educators, it is suggested that professional ethicists, experienced in the ethical issues of patient care, be employed to enrich both faculty development and the instruction of professional students.

The complexity of implementing the curriculum on professionalism and ethics throughout the professional program will, in most cases, require the appointment of a Coordinator of Ethics Education. This individual would work with all faculty to ensure the level of ethics education suggested in these guidelines.

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