Attitudes of optometrists towards their profession

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Part three (continued from September 23)

Aspects of an optometrist's work

In our questionnaire we also tried to look at various components and aspects of an OO's work to see how these might be viewed. We took 12 facets and asked people how much satisfaction they gained from these or imagined they would gain if they were part of their work. Again, a 7-point scale was used but this time 7 indicated 'great' satisfaction while 1 indicated 'little'.

Once more, male and female responses were analysed separately as were real and imagined ratings. We found marked similarity between the attitudes of student and gualified OOs. Amongst those without present, first-hand experience, 'helping people', 'detection of pathology' and 'meeting people' (see Fig. 8) were thought by men to provide most satisfaction, with 'examining in optometry' and 'optical polities' least. Analysis of variance failed to reveal any variation in attitude with experience for 8 out of 12 facets (see right-hand column of Fig. 8). The remaining 4 components showed statistically significant changes which were not always easy to interpret. There was a slight suggestion that students rated 'contact lenses' and 'occupational optics' more highly than

registered OOs. Ratings of 'teaching optometry' and 'supervising trainee opticians' may well be a peak for those who have only spent a few years in practice.

When we look at male registered OOs for whom these activities are part of their present pattern of work, we find a slightly different picture (Fig. 9). Once again we find that those people *doing*, rate an activity significantly higher than those *imagining*. This appears true for all 12 features. The influence of years of experience in practice on satisfaction appears quite small. Only 'refraction' and 'occupational optics' showed statistically



Figure 8—Expected satisfaction with an OO's work and his duration of experience. The questionnaire's instructions were as follows 'Please indicate the amount of satisfaction you gain from the following aspects of an OO's work. If there are any that do not involve you at present then please try and guess the amount of satisfaction you might gain. Please also indicate those aspects which are part of your present pattern of work.' 'Little satisfaction' is indicated by a rating of 1 and 'great satisfaction' by 7. The data here only concerns male expected satisfaction as we have excluded female responses and those that refer to an OO's present employment. Analysis of variance revealed no statistically significant effects of length of experience on attitudes towards 8 out of 12 features so we have only indicated the level of the average rating for these on the right. Graphs have been drawn for the other four: contact lenses, supervising trainee opticians, occupational optics and teaching optometry. It is important to note that for some attitudes the

lenses, supervising trainee opticians, occupational optics and teaching optometry. It is important to note that for some attitudes the group size for the qualified OOs were quite small. For example there were very few OOs who were not presently involved in helping people, detection of pathology and so on and this may have contributed towards us failing to find any change with experience. To emphasise and clarify this point we have put two numbers in parenthesis— the first is the number of undergraduates and the second the number of registered OOs whose responses are involved in the graphs and analysis.

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Figure 9—Satisfaction with experienced aspects of an OO's work and his length of experience. Ratings of aspects which were presently not part of the respondents work were excluded. A rating of 7 indicates "great satisfaction', while 1 indicates "little satisfaction'. For 10 out of 12 experienced features we failed to find any statistically significant variation in attitude with experience for male optometrists, although in some cases this was not surprising in view of the small samples. For example, relatively few OOs in our sample were actively involved in teaching or examining in optometry. For these aspects we just show the average level on the right. For refraction and occupational optics, analysis of variance revealed the influence of the length of experience.

significant changes and for both the suggestion was of a small increase in satisfaction with length of experience. For the other features we again find that * detection of pathology' and 'helping people' came out top with 'contact lenses', 'teaching optometry', 'meeting people', 'supervising trainee opticians' and 'refraction' not far behind.

A straight comparison of male and female attitudes amongst the undergraduates reveals only a few statistically significant differences. From t-tests we find that female students felt that they would get greater satisfaction from helping people, meeting people and carrying out refraction than men, whilst men imagine greater satisfaction from examining in optometry. The sex differences for helping and meeting people, while not large (between one third and half a point on average), are interesting and *might* suggest a slightly greater caring attitude amongst women admitted and perhaps even (and here we speculate in a mischievous fashion) amongst women in general?

Remuneration

The questionnaire asked about attitudes towards six patterns of earning. When asked to imagine themselves receiving pay in these ways

people expressed greatest satisfaction for self-employed pay ('varies as practice income') and 'basic + partial practice purchase', although with the former there was evidence of a variation with length of experience in practice (see Fig. 10). 'Basic + profit sharing' was slightly less popular, although again there was a variation with experience. 'Basic + incentive bonus' and 'basic + commission' were notable for the difference in attitude between the students and registered OOs. For undergraduates these were rated more highly than 'basic only' pay, whilst for the registered OOs they were rated less highly and received the lowest ratings of all. There was no evidence of any variation in attitude to 'basic only' with experience. It seems to us that the sharp change in attitude here is unlikely to be due to a change in the type of OO being recruited as there has little change over the few years in question. Instead we incline to view that it is likely to reflect a change in attitude which takes place within the ophthalmic opticians in their formative years at college as they gain a better understanding of the terms involved and what it means to be paid for one's labours.

If we look at the attitudes of optometrists who actually receive their pay in these ways, we find in each case that they rate the methods more highly that those who do not. 'Varies as practice income' remains top, but all methods receive an average rating of over 4.4. In Figure 10 we have only indicated the satisfaction levels for three ratings as these were the only ones to have sufficient responses for estimating reliable averages.

The attitudes of women OOs appeared similar to the above with one small variation. When asked to imagine themselves receiving pay by the various methods, women students rated 'varies as practice income' less highly than men students.

Optimism about the future

We asked people about their attitude towards the future. Were they optimistic or pessimistic? In general we found that ophthalmic opticians were more optimistic about their own future than that of the profession (see Fig. 11). Amongst the qualified male OOs the average response towards the profession's future was neither optimistic nor pessimistic (close to a rating of 4.0) but amongst the students there was significantly more optimism. One might speculate that it takes a few vears of immersion in optics to become conversant with its problems. When we look at people's view of their own future we again find that students tend to be more optimistic but that the continued on page $\overline{24}$

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Figure 10—Expected and experienced satisfaction with remuneration procedures and length of experience. The questionnaire explained the information required as follows 'Here are some ways in which an optician's earnings are determined. Please indicate which most applies to yourself . . . Also indicate the degree of satisfaction you would feel if each formula was applied to your earnings either now or in the future'. 'Very dissatisfied' was indicated by a rating of 1 and 'very satisfied' by 7. Here we have excluded responses which applied to a respondent's present pay method. Analysis of variance revealed statistically significant variation in expected satisfaction for four methods with length of experience and we show the graphs for these. For two methods of payment—basic plus partial practice purchase and basic only— there was no evidence of any change with experience and the average levels are indicated on the right. When we look at OOs' attitudes towards their present earning methods we only have sufficient data to give reliable averages for three categories. Analysis of variance reveals no evidence of experience involvement for these and the average responses have been presented on the right but with the method underlined to indicate experienced satisfaction. Results here are for men only.

decline which comes with experience is only marginal. A similar pattern is found for women's attitudes although female students tend to be slightly less optimistic than their male counterparts for both their own and the profession's future.

The work of fellow professionals

We asked our sample to express their attitudes towards the work of four groups of professionals. For ophthalmologists and general medical practitioners there was no sign of any variation with length of OO's experience (see Fig. 12). Ratings of satisfaction with the work of OOs and DOs declined by over a point during the four years of training and then showed a non-significant increase with experience. The average attitude to DOs' work by qualified OOs appeared neutral expressing neither satisfaction





nor dissatisfaction. It was interesting to note that ophthalmologists' work appeared to be highly regarded, in the sense that the ratings were similar to those given to OOs themselves. We did



Figure 12—Satisfaction with the work of four groups of professionals and length of experience. The question was posed as follows 'How satisfied are you with the work of the following people and bodies in so far as they relate to the profession of ophthalmic opticians? 'Very dissatisified' is indicated by a rating of 1 and 'very satisfied' by a rating of 7.' Analysis of variance revealed no change in male attitude towards ophthalmologists and general medical practitioners as a function of the duration of experience and the average ratings are given on the right. Responses towards OOs and DOs are indicated by the graphs.

not specifically ask about the work of 'ophthalmic medical practitioners'. The results shown in Figure 12 are male attitudes but those for women were similar.

Selection, training and examinations

The average attitudes varied between a rating of 4 and 5 indicating more satisfaction than dissatisfaction for selection, training and examinations. There were some variations in attitudes with experience for the examination of pre-registration OO and their training and supervision, with the suggestion that satisfaction with these was lowest with final year and recently qualified OOs, but even here the average response barely dropped below 4.

Histograms showing the weighted GOG Register response are shown in Fig. 13 and these confirm the generally positive attitudes. Perhaps our main interest lies in the attitudes towards the selection of OOs for undergraduate training and here we find that only 18 per cent of registered ophthalmic opticians are at all dissatisfied with these procedures compared with 15 per cent who are very satisfied. There were no differences between male and female undergraduates on these matters.

TO BE CONTINUED



Figure 13—Satisfaction with three optical bodies, and selection, training and experience. The histograms show the relative frequency of ratings on a seven-point scale by registered OOs in the sample. Their responses have been weighted according to their age and sex in order to estimate the opinions of those on the Register. A rating of 1 indicates "very dissatisfied" and 7 'very satisfied". The percentage figures on the right indicate the weighted proportion showing dissatisfaction—ratings of 1, 2, or 3. The histograms are based on sample sizes of n = 385 to 466.