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Editorial

by Don Wong, R. B. P., F. O. P. S.

A milestone has been reached. This, the First Issue of the Journal of the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society (JOPS) is the culmination of many years of discussion, planning and effort, and is the final, happy fruition of a vital society function. For a professional society still in its juvenile years, the attainment of such a goal during its first decade is no small achievement, and we are rightfully proud of it. It is inevitable that, at such a moment as this, we should pause in retrospect, to recall that day in the spring of 1969, when Johnny Justice Jr. approached a group of photographers who were attending the A RVO meeting in Sarasota, Florida, and discussed the feasibility of a new society. It is also natural for us to reminisce about the "early days" of the OPS, and to wonder about the future.

That the OPS has had an influence on our profession cannot be denied. For those of us who have been in the field before the creation of the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society, and indeed before the advent of fluorescein angiography as a clinical diagnostic test, the changes that have taken place, not only in the complexion of the profession itself, but also in the personnel currently performing these tests are apparent. My personal observations, gained since my entry into the field of medical photography 25 years ago, is that the course that the biomedical photographic profession has taken is very similar to that of the medical profession itself, namely, that of splitting off into sub-specialties. Members of these sub-specialties inevitably find advantages in banding together, and in the organization of professional groups with which to serve their continuing educational needs. Our field has been no different.

Prior to angiography, any photographic work performed for the ophthalmologist was most probably being done by a departmental medical photographer, by the physician himself, or by a medical photographer on staff in the central medical photography department, to whom all eye patients were sent. Though some ophthalmology departments did, indeed, have a professional photographer on staff, much of the photographic work was still provided to the ophthalmologist by the central institutional medical photography department. A large percentage was probably being done by the ophthalmologist himself, however. The clinical photography of eye patients at that time included only external eye photography and fundus photography. Slit-lamp photography was so specialized, that for years, the physician had to do the work himself due to an almost total lack of photographers who were familiar with this discipline.

At the time of the advent of fluorescein angiography as a diagnostic test, it is probably safe to say that the majority of clinical angiography was being performed by a professional photographer who invariably had been functioning in the area of general biomedical photography, and who was immediately available to be assimilated into new angiographic programs that began to spring up throughout the world. Thus we have seen that the initial generation of fluorescein angiographers were those medical photographers who have had experience in medical photography and fundus photography, and who were available to make a quick transition into the new sub-specialty, ultimately come to be known as "ophthalmic photography".

This sub-specialty underwent intense and rapid growth and expansion during the late 1960's and early 1970's, triggered by the sudden, mass interest in fluorescein angiography. The demand for qualified personnel to work with the great numbers of newly installed angiographic equipment quickly depleted the supply, and an influx was then seen of the second generation of angiographers, ie, from the ranks of biomedical photographers with no previous experience in fundus work, commercial and industrial photographers who were personally known to an ophthalmologist who needed an angiographer, and so on.

Thus, unknown to Mr. Johnny Justice, Jr. and to the small founding group, the creation of the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society in 1969 came at an extremely timely period for the profession, as was witnessed, not only by the growth in the membership rolls in those first years, but also by the cross-section of professional backgrounds seen in the membership. At that time there was a universal need for technical information, training and education, and we began to see a large number of persons entering the field who had no technical photographic training at all.

The OPS began to exert its influence, first in the most important aspect of organizing many people engaged in the field, into a cohesive group; secondly, by giving the inexperienced and untrained who were already hired to perform these tasks personal and direct contact with others who had experience; thirdly, by stimulating the recognition of the dire need for comprehensive practical work-training sessions. Thus, the first of many workshops sponsored, at first by the manufacturers in cooperation with major medical centers, took place in 1970, followed by workshops coordinated by OPS members at their respective institutions, and finally by the society itself at its Annual Educational courses. More recently, the OPS Regional Meetings in New York City have offered workshops which have drawn large audiences, thus demonstrating a continued need for such training sessions. The primary service provided to the profession therefore, is that of bringing all parties involved *together*, as well as to provide a forum from which education and training may be offered.

As time passed, we began to see a slow and gradual change in the complexion of the profession, not only in terms of distribution patterns of the angiographic equipment, but additionally, in terms of the personnel engaged in the field. The departmental photographer enjoyed a brief period of luxurious existence in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and it was not uncommon to see an ophthalmology department supporting a photographic staff, equal in size or even larger than the central biomedical photographic service of that institution.

This was all created by the intense interest generated by fluorescein angiography, not only as a clinical diagnostic test, but also as an investigative tool. With the approach of the mid-1970's, however, and with the deterioration of the economic situation, the growth of ophthalmic photographic laboratories tapered off, with many of the larger units beginning to trim their staffs. At the same time, many physicians and medical groups saw an economic and professional advantage in having their own angiographic equipment in their offices, thus initiating a radical change in the personnel performing angiography. Unable, or unwilling to hire a professional photographer for his office staff, the physician opted rather to perform the angiography himself, or to train his existing office staff. Additionally, at that same time, an increasing number of ophthalmic medical assistants were being hired in the physicians' offices to perform many functions, including clerical as well as testing. These persons, similarly in need of technical assistance and information as the previous, second generation of angiographers now comprise the third generation, and have joined our society for their continuing education.

Thus the OPS membership today no longer has a homogeneous membership composed of professional photographers, but has a rather mixed group of professionals, ie, photographers, ophthalmic medical assistants, nurses and secretary-receptionists, not to mention a number of physicians, all with a common interest- fluorescein angiography.

Having seen this changing complexion in its membership, it was soon recognized that in order to ensure a top level of quality of performance in the field, the OPS was obliged to attempt to provide a platform of

Certification. The importance of certification became increasingly apparent as consumer groups began to exert their influence in the medical profession by taking up active "watch-dog" functions throughout the industry. However, it also became apparent to our certifying committees that our mixed membership would make the task of certification considerably more difficult, due to the fact that they had members of different entry points into ophthalmology, and therefore had varying educational and training backgrounds to consider. Nevertheless, we are drawing inexorably closer to the successful formulation and implementation of a recognized program of certification of the ophthalmic photographer within the very near future. Such a program will not only enhance our professional standing, but strengthen our society.

Now, in our society's ninth year, we have finally succeeded in bringing to reality, the long-awaited Journal of the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society. The intent and objective of the Editorial Committee, Editorial Staff and the Editor is to bring to the entire OPS membership the world over, a top quality, professional trade journal, whose primary aim shall be one of education, basic as well as continuing. Of necessity, budgetary considerations shall limit our production to only one issue a year. Our future issues shall be of greater scope, with full color reproductions throughout the Journal, and, as soon as is feasible, we shall attempt to publish more than one issue per year. The emphasis for the next few issues shall be on education. We intend to present tutorials, with instruction on the techniques of fundus photography, slit-lamp photography, and other disciplines in ophthalmic photography as an aid to those members who are not able to attend any of the society workshops. In order that we may succeed in these objectives, and meet your individual needs, may I urge that you take an active part in providing in-put by writing to me, and advising me of the type of material that you would like to see in the Journal. I am also urging active participation from the membership by submitting articles for consideration for the Journal. In this way, each of you shall experience the great sense of gratification that the Editorial staff and I have had with the production of this first issue of the JOPS.