

House rejects plan for certification

SAN DIEGO — The most recent campaign to have speciality recognition within the AOA went down in defeat in the House of Delegates during Congress.

Delegates voted 781-608 to reject a document from the AOA Commission on Optometric Specialties which would have established petitioners' guidelines for special interest areas recognition.

Commission Chairman Craig Willoth, O.D., had argued for the AOA to establish some method to make certification valid and credible and to give the association some control over what he said is already occurring within optometry.

Before the vote, however, delegates countered that they feared certification would fragment the association and restrict optometrists from practicing in all the areas they wanted to.

The House's decision adds another chapter to a decade-long battle over certification. The issue had been debated for years before the House formed the commission in 1984, instructing it to develop

criteria for special interests and for certifying bodies. The House in 1985 was somewhat reluctant to accept the commission's report, although it did eventually allow the commission to continue its work.

This year, the document itself drew no criticism, but rather debate centered on the certification but felt it was a necessity. "I would like for there to be no certification at all. However, certification is going on in optometry all around us."

He said the real issue was for AOA to have control over certification. "It will develop regardless of what we think, and we should have some control over how it develops and in what directions it develops."

Delegates, however, did not agree. They contested Dr. Willoth's assertion that certification was already occurring in groups such as the College of Optometrist in Vision Development, the American Academy of Optometry and the National Eye Research Foundation.

Paul Dowell, O.D., of Ohio, said cer-

tification would add more fuel to a trend by insurance carriers to require specialty certification for reimbursement for certain procedures.

In addition, he said, certification would create obstacles for students and existing practitioners that would "make them go through hoops" and lock them out of certain areas of practice.

Arguing in favor of certification was Edward Johnston, O.D., dean of the State University of New York State College of Optometry and president of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry. He said ASCO favors the development of specialty certification.

"Optometric education can no longer educate our graduates to fulfill all areas this profession has expanded into," he said. "We cannot provide the type of specialty education that we once did."

He noted that the growth in the number of post-graduate residencies, which now number approximately 50, indicates a strong interest by young practitioners

to "move in new and different ways" into specialty areas.

The AOA's entry into certification, he added, would also be a way of making sure that the public receives good care.

In a later interview, Dr. Willoth said the commission has nothing left to do on the subject and that the report is still available should the House wish to reconsider it.

In the meanwhile, he predicted that more organizations would begin certifying in specialty areas, a move that will eventually force the AOA to look again at its position.

"I do think you're going to see certification come up again (in the House) two to four years down the road," he said.


Charity

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payments during Congress, the money earmarked for patient-care aspects of the program. Omni's clinic in Lexington, Ky., has participated in the pilot project. In addition, the AOA Board of Trustees voted in its post-Congress meeting to devote \$15,000 toward implementing the program.

The program's goal is to hold the first national "Give One Day" event by December 1987. The "give one day" concept, already in use in several states besides Kentucky, indicates that optometrists will set aside one day per year for providing free eye examinations to needy patients.

To bring the program to full bloom will require dedication, said AOA Trustee James C. Leadingham, O.D., of Ashland, Ky., the liaison trustee and former consultant to the National Opto-


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