The Association of Dispensing Opticians, Ltd.

Two letters from the Association of Dispensing Opticians, should be of interest to ophthalmic surgeons. The first points out that if ophthalmic surgeons send patients to have a prescription for glasses made up to any firm of sight-testing opticians, there is a distinct possibility that such patients may be induced on future occasions to return to the sight-testing optician instead of re-visiting the ophthalmic surgeon. In this connexion it is pointed out that in an article in the Optician, of December 23, 1932, it is stated that a sight-testing optician went so far as to refuse to dispense the prescription of an ophthalmic surgeon. The Optician condemns this attitude giving as one reason the possibility of the sight-testing optician being able to wean the patient from consulting an ophthalmic surgeon in the future, by pointing out that the services of the latter in a case of refraction for glasses are unessential. Comment is almost unnecessary. In our opinion the sight-testing optician who adopts such practices is more likely to injure himself, in the estimation of the intelligent members of the public, than the ophthalmic surgeon.
The second letter reviews the extent to which the population in general is resorting to sight-testing opticians for ophthalmic examination. “During the year 1931 the turnover of the Joint Council of Qualified Opticians, which deals with insured persons entitled to ophthalmic benefit, was reckoned at half-a-million of money, representing approximately 350,000 patients. In addition, other sight-testing opticians not connected with the J.C.Q.O., dealt with 50,000 insured patients, so that the total number of such cases treated by sight-testing firms during 1931 was not less than 400,000.”

It is difficult to assess the number of private patients dealt with by sight-testing opticians, but a recent article in the Optician estimated that one-eighth or one-ninth part of the business of the sight-testing optician consisted of insurance work. It is claimed that during the year in question about 3 million patients passed through their hands.

The Association has reason to think that the number of patients examined annually by ophthalmic surgeons (excluding hospital cases) does not exceed half-a-million.

It would appear that owing to propaganda, advertisement, and the ceaseless attempts by the sight-testing opticians to secure state registration, the numbers of their clients is likely to increase at the expense of those of the ophthalmic surgeons in future years.

The Association has spent much money, and is doing all in its power to counteract these injurious influences, and may be congratulated on the origin of the National Ophthalmic Treatment Board which has been functioning for the past three years. To date more than 104,000 patients, who would in all probability have gone in the ordinary course of affairs to sight-testing opticians, have been diverted to ophthalmic surgeons, and the total fees paid to them already exceed £50,000.

The Association points out that their interests are bound up irrevocably with those of the ophthalmic surgeon. In view of their loyalty to us it is to be hoped that ophthalmic surgeons will continue to make the fullest use of the services the Association offers. It would appear that a very large number of ophthalmic surgeons do so already, and it is to be hoped that the number of those who do will increase as years go by. It may not always be possible to prevent a patient from taking his or her prescription to a sight-testing optician, for this would undermine the undoubted prerogative of the patient to freedom of choice in the matter of the shops with which he or she deals; but by pointing out the advantages of, in particular, the correct fitting of the spectacle frames, apart from the grinding of the actual lenses, it is usually possible to get our patients to go to a member of the Association.