

## COUNCIL OF BRITISH OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

## THE TEACHING OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

*The following correspondence on the teaching of ophthalmology to medical students has taken place between the Council of British Ophthalmologists and the General Medical Council. It has been sent to us for publication.*

28th March, 1923.

To the Secretary,

GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL.

DEAR SIR—The Council of British Ophthalmologists begs to draw the attention of the General Medical Council to the following statement in the final Report of the Departmental Committee on the "Causes and Prevention of Blindness," which has recently been published :

"We recognise that the inadequate knowledge of diseases of the eye possessed by the large majority of the medical profession on admission to the Register is in a large measure due to the very limited amount of training in this subject which they receive as medical students. With a few exceptions the universities and examining bodies in Great Britain do not require candidates for a qualifying degree or diploma to be examined in ophthalmology. It is true that questions on ophthalmic surgery are occasionally included in a paper or in the oral examination, but these can in no sense be considered as an adequate test of the candidate's knowledge of this subject.

"In our opinion no licence to practise medicine should be granted without satisfactory evidence of an adequate knowledge of diseases of the eye. The supervision of the medical curriculum and qualifying examinations is in the hands of the General Medical Council. This body demands of medical students three months' attendance in an ophthalmic department, but representations of the inadequacy of this regulation have failed to produce any stronger insistence on more effective training in ophthalmology.

"We recommend that the General Medical Council again be urged to insist that every student presenting himself for a qualifying examination in medicine shall be examined in ophthalmology."

This recommendation of the Departmental Committee, which was

composed of both laymen and medical men, is entirely in keeping with that submitted by the Council of British Ophthalmologists to your Council in 1919, in which it was suggested that : " no student shall be considered to have passed the qualifying examination unless he has shown a sound knowledge of practical ophthalmology in an examination conducted by ophthalmic surgeons."

The action which your Council took at that time was " That every student should be required to attend a course of practical instruction in Ophthalmology of not less than ten weeks' duration, and that no student should be admitted to the Final Examination unless he presents a certificate to the effect that he has attended such a course regularly, and that his work in connection therewith has reached a satisfactory standard."

The Council of British Ophthalmologists wishes to point out that this arrangement leaves it entirely to the ophthalmic surgeon in charge to determine what the evidence of satisfactory work in his department should be, an arrangement which is not considered sufficient with respect to any other of the essential subjects in a student's curriculum.

Further, the Council of British Ophthalmologists has ascertained that in the London Medical Schools the evidence of satisfactory work is receiving very different interpretations. In one school every student is now required to pass an examination before his certificate is signed, in others mere attendance in an ophthalmic department is recognised as sufficient.

This difference in the interpretation of the General Medical Council's requirements causes, not only a feeling of injustice amongst the students of the different schools, but is also eminently unsatisfactory in the want of uniformity in the standard of requisite knowledge which it sets up, and in placing the responsibility entirely in the hands of the teacher.

The experience of the Irish Universities and Colleges in which an examination in ophthalmology has been for many years recognised as an intrinsic part of the final examinations for their degrees and diplomas, shows that there is no great difficulty in conducting such an examination.

The Council of British Ophthalmologists desires to point out that the adoption of its recommendation would not entail any modification of the curriculum already required by the regulations of the General Medical Council, but only that an effective and uniform test be applied to the knowledge which a student should have acquired in the course of the curriculum.

The recommendation of the Departmental Committee on the " Causes and Prevention of Blindness," coinciding as it does with the previously expressed views of the Council of British Ophthalmologists, encourages the latter again to urge the General Medical

Council to insist by means of an examination in ophthalmology on a uniform standard of knowledge in this subject.

Yours very faithfully,

(Signed) J. B. LAWFOED,  
*President.*

(Signed) M. S. MAYOU,  
*Hon. Secretary.*

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General Council of  
Medical Education and Registration  
of the United Kingdom.

44, HALLAM STREET,  
PORTLAND PLACE,  
LONDON, W.1

5th June, 1923.

*The Honorary Secretary,*  
COUNCIL OF BRITISH OPHTHALMOLOGISTS,  
59, Harley Street, W.1

DEAR SIR,—I have to inform you that your letter of the 28th March, drawing attention to the Report of the Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness, was considered by the Examination Committee of the Council, and that the greater part of your communication was printed in full in the Report made by them thereon to the Council.

This Report was considered at the meeting of the Council held on the 1st June, and I was directed to inform you that it is too soon to judge of the effect of the Resolution recently adopted by the Council.

I might add that in regard to the paragraph in the Report of the Departmental Committee I was directed to inform the Ministry that on May 25th, 1922, the Council made certain recommendations to the Licensing Bodies for the improvement of the medical curriculum, one of which was that each student should receive instruction, *inter alia*, in the diseases of the eye, refraction, and the use of the ophthalmoscope. The Council thereby anticipated the wishes of the Departmental Committee as set forth in their Report, which was not published until the autumn of that year.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) NORMAN C. KING,  
*Registrar.*