

EDITORIAL

Getting Involved in Our Profession: A Tribute to Dr. Irvin Borish

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This spring, I had the opportunity to participate in the 2012 American Optometric Association Congressional Advocacy Conference and “Hill visits” in Washington, D.C. I have been coordinating and participating in these events for the past several years. The Hill visits are a grassroots citizen activist effort on behalf of the profession of optometry,

our patients and students. The conference, which takes place prior to the Hill visits, prepares the conference participants to explain the bills and issues that are before the House and Senate. It is our job to inform, discuss and be a resource for the representatives and senators from each state. Additionally, the conference always provides interesting political speakers and sometimes political debates.

The issues vary from year to year. In the past, important topics focused on the health and safety of our patients, the distribution of contact lenses without a proper prescription, patient access to care, Medicare reimbursement or insurance inequities. This year, the bills before Congress focused on student loan forgiveness in exchange for practicing in underserved areas, and changing the language of Medicaid insurance to ensure continual access to vision care. Student loan forgiveness programs are a benefit for optometric graduates and patients. The patients benefit from greater access to eye care, and graduates are relieved of some student loan debt.

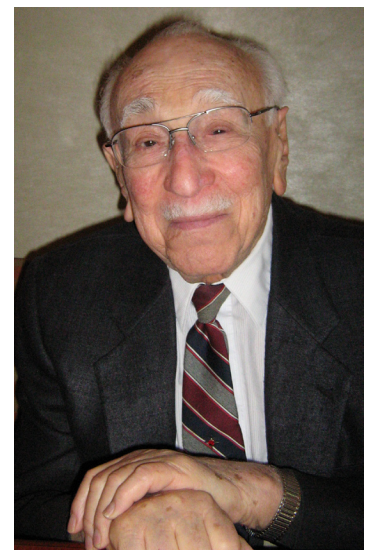
Although I do not think of myself as a very political person, the first time I went to this conference I was hooked. It usually occurs in April so the flowers are blooming in D.C., and the weather is usually about 10 degrees warmer than in Boston. The walk to Capitol Hill is spectacular. The National Mall provides a direct route to the Capitol. Walking along

the National Mall with the Capitol as your destination and the Washington Monument behind provides a sense of history and participation in government.

I realized during my first visit the incredible access Americans have to their government and the potential influence. I also realized the challenges and frustration inherent in the political process. Some bills take years to become laws, and others never make it out of committee. By participating in this event, I am providing a service to my profession as well as enabling our government representatives to do their jobs more effectively. This year, I was accompanied by several students from the New England College of Optometry. Many students from the schools and colleges of optometry around the country were in attendance, benefiting from an educational experience outside the classroom.

A Model for All of Us

While encouraging our students to get involved, I could not help thinking of Dr. Irvin Borish, a legend in the profession of optometry whose accomplishments spanned more than 76 years. Dr. Borish, who died on March 3 at age 99, was thought of as the father of modern optometry. A graduate of Northern Illinois College of Optometry, he was a man who got involved in every aspect of his profession. During his career he influenced the profession as an academic, scholar, re-



Dr. Irvin Borish

searcher, practitioner and activist. His accomplishments are almost too overwhelming to list.

Dr. Borish ran a successful private practice for more than 30 years. He held faculty positions at Northern Illinois College of Optometry, Indiana University and the University of Houston College of Optometry. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Optometry College at Indiana University in Bloomington. He authored more than 85 articles and nine textbooks. His textbook *Clinical Refraction* is known by optometry students around the world. I remember purchasing my copy as a young optometry student. While I was somewhat intimidated by the quantity of information, throughout the years it was an invaluable resource for me.

Dr. Borish's efforts to define the profession were enormous, as was his involvement with the political concerns of optometry. He had direct impact in the accreditation of the profession as well as the establishment of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry. Dr Borish contributed more than 70 years of service to the American Academy of Optometry (AAO) and its affiliate, the American Optometric Foundation. He served on almost every committee of the AAO and in 1996 endowed the AAO's Irvin M. and Beatrice Borish Award for outstanding young scientist or clinician-scientist.

In 1995, Dr Borish's commitment to research was honored by the naming of the Borish Center for Ophthalmic Research at Indiana University. His level of involvement and productivity in the area of scholarship was exemplary and helped to delineate the profession as one that is defined by evidence.

Dr. Borish was a special person and professional. Most optometrists over the course of their careers will only achieve a fraction of Dr. Borish's accomplishments. However, he illuminated for all of us the importance of research, scholarship, and true involvement in our profession. The students who took part in this year's Congressional Advocacy Conference and visits to Capitol Hill had the opportunity to get involved, which will hopefully translate into a pattern of active participation in the profession throughout their careers.

References:

1. About Dr. Borish. Indiana University School of Optometry, Borish Center for Ophthalmic Research [Internet]. Accessed 4 May 2012. Available from: http://www.opt.indiana.edu/borish_bio.aspx.
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