Baltimore's black eye care pioneers

By Helen A. Davis, M.D.

Black history month would not be complete without mentioning some black pioneers in eye care in the city of Baltimore. Dr. Tom Jones who hails from Dayton, Ohio was the first black Ophthalmologist to serve in the city of Baltimore.

Dr. Vernon Pennington was the first black Optometrist. In recent years the second black and only black woman Optometrist Dr. Bernetta Davis has established a practice in town after spending several years teaching Optometry in Nigeria.

Many of us continue to mourn the recent passing of "The Grand Dame of eye care," Dr. Lois Young. Not only was she the first black woman Ophthalmologist in the city of Baltimore, she was the first black woman to graduate from the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

She was well known and respected across the country, and is really missed by her friends and colleagues. In fact, when I moved to Baltimore from Miami to complete a fellowship in cataract surgery, lens implants and laser eye treatment, Dr. Lois Young was one of the first persons that I contacted. I had heard all the way down in Miami about my dynamic sorority sister.

Over the two years that I knew her, I have come to treasure many fond memories of her. She showed me kindness and gave me unselfish words of encouragement to continue on in this tough, progressive and challenging arena of being a young black woman in an otherwise white male dominated field.

We shared many things in common and she understood how hard I had struggled as the first black and third female in twenty-five years to complete the eye residency program at the University of Miami, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Florida.

She directed me with my studies and celebrated with me when I became a board certified Ophthalmologist. I have continued to strive for the excellence she promoted. I originally became interested in becoming an ophthalmologist (a specialist in the diseases and surgery of the eye) after my youngest brother injured his eye in an auto accident.

Because he had cut his eyelid and torn his tear duct, I became quite concerned and alarmed that he might lose his eye. Before that time, I didn't even know what the difference was between the different eye care professionals. In my younger years while growing up in Detroit, I thought that all "eye doctors" were the same.

I did not realize at that time that an oculist made artificial eyes or "glass eyes", an optician makes eyeglasses or fits eyeglasses and an optometrist principally prescribes eyeglasses and fits for contact lenses.

Although capable of performing many of the same duties, an ophthalmologist principally concentrates on diagnosing, managing and treating a variety of eye diseases and performing surgery on the eye.

I became further interested in Ophthalmology when my mother developed high pressure in her eye known as glaucoma. She had been complaining of a vague "sinus problem" and periodic headaches that she quietly endured for nearly six months.

When the pain finally became intolerable and her vision became blurred, she sought medical attention. At that time she was immediately hospitalized.

She required emergency surgery in both eyes within a few days apart to prevent her from going blind. Probably if she had sought treatment earlier, she would not have required surgery because her glaucoma could have been controlled with drops or laser treatment. Her frightening experience has led me to work as a volunteer on many occasions at health fairs around the city to screen for glaucoma.

This problem often goes unnoticed and untreated in blacks, most times it is painless. It may slowly eat away at your side vision without you knowing it until it has nearly taken away all of your sight; nonetheless, it can be a preventable cause of blindness with early detection and treatment.

Another potentially preventable cause of blindness that I am concerned with is severe diseases in the back of the eye in the retina caused by Diabetes. Often early laser treatment may control this problem as well.

Because glaucoma, diabetics and hypertension are very common in blacks, I have decided to focus my interest on problems of the eye caused by these diseases.

In addition, I have developed a special interest in treating arthritis-related eye problems, and also specialize in cataract surgery. Although these problems are most often seen in the elderly, they can occur in younger individuals too.

Categorically, eye injuries are more common in young adults and even more common among black youth male. A lifetime of poor vision can often be prevented by avoiding fights and wearing safety glasses to protect the eyes when playing sports, working around machinery, hammering or working with car batteries, chemicals or explosives.

Dr. Helen A. Davis

If you have further questions about your eyes or eye care, write them on a post card and send them to "Ask your eye doctor" care of Dr. Helen A. Davis, M.D., 300 Armory Place, Suite 3K, Baltimore, MD 21201.

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BOY SCOUT News & Notes

One good turn deserves another: The Boy Scouts of America would agree. The organization's "Good Turn" policy traces back to American businessman William D. Boyce, who was once lost in a London fog. A boy offered to take him to the address he wanted, then refused a tip, saying he was a Boy Scout. Boyce later had the boy take him to Scouting's British founder Lord Baden-Powell—and from this chance meeting, the Boy Scouts of America was born.

BICENTENNIAL FACTS

Presented By

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DID YOU KNOW THAT:

1787 — Independent Black Worshipers left Lovely Lane Church to form their own worshipping society. This was the beginning of Sharp Street Church.

1797 — Sharp Street Church took over a school to teach black children to read and write from the Society for the Abolition of Slavery. This became the first Black Public School in Baltimore.

Rev. Eugene Matthews, Pastor

Continued from last week

Blacks and the American Constitution 1970-present

The Court of Appeals had held the practice unconstitutional because its ultimate effect was racially discriminatory. But the Supreme Court found no evidence of racial hostility in the record.

Even though a disproportionate racial impact could be shown and racial discrimination may have been one of the motives of the public officials, this intent was not demonstrated by sufficient proof. The constitutionality of the ordinance was upheld.

Justice Powell did further clarify the "discriminatory intent" requirement established in the testing case. He said that it is not required to show that the action was undertaken solely for racially discriminatory purposes or even that racial discrimination was the primary purpose.

It is enough to show that discrimination was one of the motivating factors. Racially discriminatory intent could be shown by a combination of disproportionate impact, historical background, departure from normal procedures and contemporary statements of decision-makers.

BRIG. GEN. HAZEL JOHNSON
Head of Nurses Corps

MARY CHURCH TERRELL
Educator and reformer

The requirements of Washington v. Davis and Arlington Heights led to the speculation the Court would further restrict desegregation remedies at the next opportunity.

The impact of Washington v. Davis and Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corporation, taken together meant that in order to successfully attack discriminatory policies, the plaintiff must demonstrate that the harm complained of was the result of "purposeful discrimination."

The Court decided that official acts could not be held unconstitutional solely because it has a racially disproportionate impact. Such actions would survive constitutional scrutiny unless there was also proof of discriminatory intent.

This new requirement that racially discriminatory intent be shown, made it much more difficult to attack official acts of racial discrimination.

It required the plaintiff to prove the motives of public officials. The standards set out in Davis and Arlington Heights have had a significant impact on the strategies to attack racial discrimination in housing, employment, education and voting.

Affirmative Action

An issue which has been given a significant amount of attention in the courts and in public debate since 1970 is the development and implementation of affirmative action programs.

The term affirmative action has generally been used to describe race-conscious programs designed to provide relief to identified victims of racial discrimination.

More recently the term has been used to describe programs designed to increase the participation of women, minorities and the handicapped even where no past discrimination has been proven.

These programs are designed to give preference to any member of a class or group which had been historically excluded from economic or educational opportunity.

In the seventies, the legal challenges to affirmative action have been attempts to determine the limits of race conscious remedies that could be adopted in the absence of the proof of past racial discrimination.

In 1978, 1979, and 1980, three important cases were decided which provided many important answers about the constitutional limitations on affirmative action programs. Those cases, Regents of The University of California v. Bakke, (1978) United Steelworkers v. Weber, (1978) and Fullilove v. Klutznick (1980) form a trilogy of cases with significant implications for affirmative action plans which operate in three different arenas.

These affirmative action plans have an impact on Afro-Americans in education, employment and as contractors who provide products and services to governmental agencies.

Allan Bakke challenged a preferential admissions program which had been established at the medical school of the University of California.

The medical school was a state institution located in a racially diverse state but had enrolled few minority students. In order to increase the number of minority students in the medical school the University developed a special admissions program.

That special admissions program was established to increase the number of minority students in the medical school even though there had been no allegation that the school had discriminated in past admissions practices.

A certain number of places in each entering class were reserved and made available only to minority students. The court, in one of its longest and most complex decisions decided that under certain circumstances race was a proper variable to take into consideration in the admissions process.

The Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution, however, prevents the use of rigid categories which are racially exclusionary except where a compelling state purpose can be shown.

The racially exclusionary program at the University of Califor-

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