

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS – 1977
ORTHOPTICS – THE EXPANDED ROLE

Vivienne J. Gordon, Melbourne.

The expanded role of the modern orthoptist can no longer be described entirely in terms of ocular motility. Orthoptics is a specialised branch of medical science in the area of applied ocular physiology. The orthoptist is a responsible and clinically trained professional, working as part of the ophthalmic team within the scope and ethics of ancillary medical practice.

Orthoptists provide specialist services in the investigation and treatment of disorders of ocular motility, the importance of which must not be overlooked. The expanded role includes visual field testing, glaucoma investigation techniques, ancillary diagnosis including areas relating to applied electro-physiology and preventive visual screening. The orthoptist may also assist the ophthalmologist in the management of eye diseases which require special investigation and control and in patient education and counselling.

There is a need to contribute to patient care through an increased awareness and understanding of the team approach, by placing particular emphasis on knowledge of preventive measures and by maximising cost-benefit effectiveness. To meet these needs, orthoptists must be highly educated but broadly trained, able to evaluate and analyse and be skilful in performing modern techniques.

In anticipating our future role we must continue to develop within the structure of ancillary medical practice, working not in a primary care relationship with patients but always by referral from a registered medically qualified practitioner. We are a rapidly growing profession and as such it is essential that we guard jealously our professional position, ensuring that in all states there is an awareness of inter-professional views and relationships and, in particular, that the newer members of our Association are fully aware of all implications of orthoptic practice.