B. Ralph Chou, BSc, MSc, OD, FAAO
Editor-in-Chief

My sister recently closed her office after more than 40 years of practice as an orthodontist. The most time-consuming task was the disposal of her clinical records. They included a huge collection of paper files, 35 mm slides, and plaster casts, not to mention data files as she shifted to computerized records in recent years. It took months of after-hours time while she continued treating her patients over the last year.

As some of us reach the same milestone as optometrists, record disposal is an equally formidable task. Secure disposal of patient and practice information is an absolute necessity that most health professionals have neither the time nor the training to deal with.

Both of our Canadian schools of optometry are updating their curricula and facilities to continue meeting the growing needs of our patients and the rapidly expanding technology in a modern optometric practice. Continuing education programs and trade shows are filled with new technologies that expand our abilities to detect and manage vision and eye conditions earlier and more effectively. But with these new technologies comes an increase in the amount of data we must gather, interpret, and store about our patients. At the same time, we see artificial intelligence (AI) taking a role in handling these data and providing the practitioner with suggestions for managing the patient's condition.

September 2025 marked 50 years since I walked into my first optometry class at the University of Waterloo in the building on Columbia Street West. Even then the 4-year curriculum was heavy, and that was without having to learn electronic record systems along with all the clinical skills and procedures. As an academic, curriculum development was always a concern to me, given the limited classroom and clinic time available. It is critical to strike the right balance between basic and clinical knowledge, manual and technological skills, patient and practice management, and current and future professional demands in a 4-year curriculum.

However, it is clear that not all necessary life skills and knowledge can be taught in the professional program. Critical thinking and basic technology skills, like the use and limitations of AI and data security, can be reinforced, but today's optometry students need to have these before they enter the program.

My sister is now in semi-retirement, finishing her last patients' treatments and planning for when she finally calls it a day. Records have been shredded, identifying labels removed, and the dumpster filled. Her experience reminds me that forward planning for winding down one's career is yet another life skill that all of us need to acquire, better sooner than later.

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