



The Editorial Page

SUNDAY NEWS

March 31, 2024 • Page B1

Hindsight, eyesight

A good optometrist measure

Younger generations as well as transplants to New Hampshire may not know of a time when certain vested medical interests fought tooth and nail against the idea of independent medical service and testing clinics for our state. What we take for granted today in terms of options for ambulatory surgical services and diagnostic testing are the result of years of time and effort to convince legislators that convenience and lower cost for consumers did not have to mean a loosening of medical safeguards or calamity for the big health care institutions.

History appears to be repeating itself today in terms of eye care. Indeed, the same special interests who have argued against expanding eye care privileges for the last 30 years are still at it today. This is despite the lack of evidence that the incremental changes that have made it through have done anything to lessen quality.

Unlike in other states, New Hampshire law still prohibits your optometrist from performing certain

medical procedures, even though his or her medical training requires it and colleagues in other states are routinely doing them. A dozen states now allow optometrists to perform in-office laser procedures. Eighteen allow removal of eye lesions, and 42 states allow them to perform injections.

Not New Hampshire. Here only ophthalmologists are permitted to perform such procedures.

But while our population is skewing older and thus in more need of such care, the availability of ophthalmologists is on the decline. We already have two counties in which there are no such practitioners and three more with just a single such office. The convenience that would come with allowing local optometrists to handle these procedures is inestimable.

The Legislature is considering Senate Bill 440 to address this issue. Hindsight can clearly see the past waste of time and money in opposing sensible health care reform. We trust foresight will rule the day this time.