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## About Heart Disease: A Conversation with Morey X. Powell

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Readers will have to be at least 75 years old to remember when heart disease, and heart attacks, were much more prevalent than they are today. And readers will have to be at least that old to recall when the median amount of years that people lived was dramatically fewer than it is today. Three-quarters of a century ago, the word "cholesterol" was not in the vocabulary of the average adult; and "breaking" cholesterol down into HDL and LDL, was totally off the radar screen of even many physicians.

Morey Powell has a mind and a memory nearly as sharp as it was during his 70 years practicing optometry. In the late 1940s he was a leader among a relatively few professionals in health care who felt that there were hidden secrets in human blood that directly affected how people lived and how long they lived. Dr. Powell had his office in Middletown, PA and was well respected in that community, not only by his peers but also by his patients and the community at large.

Wanting to be sure that he would not become a victim of heart disease like his father who died at age 42, Dr. Powell became addicted to learning more about how some folks get heart disease at an early age and others do not. He read medical literature that came from France and from Italy. He became a disciple of Dr. John Gosman of the University of California in Berkeley. He embraced the Swedish Swenberg Index, dealing with atherosclerosis. He made personal and thorough studies of fatty diets and fatty foods that he suspected might trigger higher cholesterol numbers, essentially in the HDLs. In the 1950s, hardly any of the medical practitioners in mid-Pennsylvania provided detailed blood analyses services like he needed. So he urged his friends to get blood samples and send them, via airmail, to a California lab for analysis. I say "via airmail" since that was not the mailing method of choice a half century ago.

Those friends included former AOA presidents Mel Wolfberg and Al Levin; PCO faculty member Harry Kaplan; and me. He arranged for all of us to get samples of our blood and he sent those samples to California for examination and analysis. And from the results of our blood analyses he created diets for us to follow. Remember, if you will, that this was in the early 1950s before Dr. Wolfberg, Levin, Kaplan and I were *really* active in optometric organizations. There were others.

The diets Dr. Powell created were simple: low on fatty foods, moderate on carbohydrates, regular exercise, and absolutely no smoking. This is commonplace information that physicians give their patients today. But 60 years ago it was revolutionary.

To put things into a proper perspective, those were the days long before cell phones were developed and it was commonplace to have party lines (that is, when more than one

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family not living together shared one telephone line!) Here is a little story about telephoning in those days as Morey tells it:

People did not dial or press keys to make a telephone call in my early practice days. Instead, once you picked up the phone from its cradle, a female voice of an operator said 'number please' and the callers gave the numbers that they wished to call. There were no telephone messaging machines. It is hard to believe but when patients wanted to call my office and I was on vacation, the local telephone operator told callers that I was away and when I would be back. She recorded the names of the callers and gave me a list of those names when I returned!

Morey Powell was athletic and he took chances with his life. He raced cars; he flew his own airplane; he parachuted; he played semi-pro baseball. He vowed that he might die young because of his activities, but he would not die young because he had a heart attack. Although Dr. Wolfberg passed away a couple of years ago - well into his 80s - the other three of us - Levin, Kaplan and I - are still going strong. Dr. Powell had his 100th birthday earlier this year.

Although his passion was for general good health, he devoted much of his free time to his optometric involvement to association work. His activities included going through the chairs of the Pennsylvania Optometric Association ending with being POA president. He also served as president of the alumni association of the Pennsylvania State College of Optometry. (Putting the word "State" in the name of Dr. Powell's alma mater is no mistake; the college had "State" as part of its name until the early 1940s when it made an agreement to drop it to accommodate Penn State University that complained about a conflict in the similarity of names. I wonder how many PSCO grads are still living today.)

Powell was active civically, too. And he was well known in his community. Where else in these United States would you find a telephone operator to keep a record of calls for a vacationing doctor?

I shall share a secret why: Dr. Morey Powell was a gem and a conversation with him was and is a delightful experience.