

*file
Commission Hearing
Relation*

December 13, 1960

Dr. Eric Oldberg before the City Council Committee on Health, upon his appointment as President of the Board of Health.

Since there was no stenographer present, the following is necessarily my best recollection of Dr. Oldberg's testimony this morning on the subject of hospital discrimination against qualified Negro physicians:

"I do not think that hospital bias against staff appointments for Negro physicians comes within the purview of the Health Department. I do not think that I should be a torchbearer for this, or that it is part of what I would have to do as President of the Board of Health.

"I certainly understand the problem. I am vice-president of a group which has been trying to expand medical opportunities for Negroes, starting with the medical schools, the internships, the residencies, and the patients in the hospitals. I think that it is a difficult thing to go to these hospitals, which are private institutions where the doctors get together and vote on staff appointments, and say to them that they have to take on a Negro physician because he is a Negro.

"You are talking to someone who knows a good deal about these problems and has done a good deal. I do not have to defend my position. I have talked at length to physicians about this problem and I have not seen any evidence of bias.

"This is something that has to be done in a quiet way. I am familiar with Dr. McLean's speech before the Institute of Medicine and his position, and I do not agree entirely on the way to handle the situation. Dr. Stepto, sitting next to me, can testify to my position and my feelings. I do not need to defend my position.

"I believe in working on a problem of this kind quietly and out of the limelight. I do not care what the City Council said in a resolution it passed three years ago. Perhaps I ought not to say this. I do not think that I should enter on the duties of President of the Board of Health under the handicap of having to proceed first of all on a problem of this kind.

"I am a vice-president of the group Dr. McLean heads - a national foundation for medical education for Negroes - and we have worked on this problem for many years. I do not need to defend my position.

"It is my opinion that this problem of hospital staff appointment is not one of the pressing problems of the Board of Health, nor one of the minor problems, at least not for the present."