Optometry

on the Team

Optometrists are an integral part of the primary care delivery team. They remain the major point of entry for patients seeking eye and vision care, providing primary eye care, advanced treatment and pathology management. Working jointly with primary care physicians, optometrists provide a continuum of quality, cost-effective eye care for Pennsylvania’s diverse patient population.

Ocular Health Assessment

Optometrists in Pennsylvania are responsible for the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the visual system. Therefore, optometrists routinely examine eyes for signs of eye disease and general health conditions, including glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration and ocular manifestations of systemic disease such as diabetes, thyroid disorders, hypertension, lupus and multiple sclerosis. They also remove superficial foreign bodies and treat eye injuries.

Management of Ocular Disease

Optometrists manage most conditions of the eye, including glaucoma and infection, with appropriate counseling, timely follow-up, medications or a combination of the above. While doctors of optometry are able to treat most of the conditions that their patients present with, optometrists consult with primary care physicians and other medical specialists to coordinate care when appropriate.

Co-Management

Optometrists refer patients to the proper subspecialists and provide pre- and post-operative care for many ocular surgeries. They are also especially well suited to follow diabetic patients as well as patients with hypertension and thyroid disease through timely eye examinations.

Refractive Care

Optometrists provide vision care services for myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism and presbyopia, including prescribing eye glasses and contacts.

Vision Therapy

Optometrists provide treatment of binocular disorders, focusing problems and visually-related learning problems.

Low Vision Rehabilitation

Optometrists provide the evaluation and management of visually impaired individuals.

Access to Care

Optometrists are highly accessible practitioners in Pennsylvania. Optometrists practice in almost every county, and 75% of optometrists have evening or weekend office hours.

Optometric Education

As primary eye care providers, doctors of optometry are an integral part of the health care team, earning their doctoral degree just as dentists, podiatrists and other doctors do.

Prior to admittance into optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor’s degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics courses.

Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral-level study concentrating on the eye, vision and associated systemic disease. In addition to profession-specific courses, optometrists are required to take systemic health courses that focus on a patient’s overall medical condition as it relates to the eyes.

Upon completion of optometry school, candidates graduate from their accredited college of optometry and hold the doctor of optometry (OD) degree. Some optometrists participate in residency programs following optometry school.

Licensure

To practice in Pennsylvania, optometrists must be licensed by the Pennsylvania State Board of Optometry. To be licensed by the Board, optometrists must hold a Doctor of Optometry degree and pass the rigorous examination administered by the National Board of Examiners in Optometry. Optometrists must also earn a minimum of 30 hours of continuing education each two-year cycle for license renewal.
What is a Doctor of Optometry?

Doctors of optometry (ODs) are the primary health care professionals for the eye. Optometrists examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases, injuries and disorders that affect the eye or vision as well as identify related systemic conditions affecting the eye.

Optometrists provide a wide range of care for their patients. They detect and diagnose eye diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts, retinal disorders, lid disorders and infections such as conjunctivitis; prescribe medication to treat eye diseases; evaluate and treat vision conditions such as nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia; remove superficial foreign objects from the ocular surface and external structures of the eye; provide pre- and post-operative care, especially for glaucoma, laser, refractive and cataract surgeries; and provide vision rehabilitation for visually impaired patients.

Optometrists as Patient Advocates

In addition to being the experts on eye and vision diseases and disorders, doctors of optometry have the education and training to diagnose the ocular manifestations of diseases that affect the entire body, such as diabetes and hypertension.

Optometrists are also in a unique position to help their patients evaluate when a condition requires surgical intervention. Because optometrists are experienced in pre- and post-operative care, but do not perform surgery, they can give an unbiased opinion of the need for surgery and often manage their patients’ care pre- and post-operatively.

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