

# Chapter 11

## Interprofessional Eye Care: A Vision That Really Works

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### ABSTRACT

*Doctors of Optometry and optometric students, interns, and residents are valuable members of the interprofessional team. Including both primary eye care and more specialized optometric care that can encompass elements of secondary and tertiary care in the collaborative care of patients ensures a holistic, whole-body approach to wellness and supports patients' quality of life. Doctors of Optometry play a vital role in ensuring optimal health throughout the lifespan, and in particular, for people with chronic conditions and complex health concerns. The authors explore examples of how optometrists participate in the healthcare team and describe how optometrists can make an impact for patients across the life span.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3066-5.ch011

## INTRODUCTION

Doctors of Optometry and optometric students, interns, and residents are valuable members of the interprofessional team. Including both primary eye care and more specialized optometric care, that can encompass elements of secondary and tertiary care, in the collaborative care of patients ensures a holistic, whole-body approach to wellness and supports patients' quality of life. Doctors of Optometry play a vital role in ensuring optimal health throughout the lifespan, and in particular, for people with chronic conditions and complex health concerns.

The American Optometric Association emphasizes the role of optometrists as independent primary health care professionals. The full definition of the profession with examples of the scope of practice and professional role is provided in Figure 1 (American Optometric Association).

*Figure 1. Definition of Doctors of Optometry from the American Optometric Association*

**Doctors of Optometry (O.D.s/optometrists) are the independent primary health care professionals for the eye (American Optometric Association). Optometrists examine, diagnose, treat, and manage diseases, injuries, and disorders of the visual system, the eye, and associated structures as well as identify related systemic conditions affecting the eye.**

- **Doctors of Optometry prescribe medications, low vision rehabilitation, vision therapy, spectacle lenses, contact lenses, and perform certain surgical procedures.**
- **Optometrists counsel their patients regarding surgical and non-surgical options that meet their visual needs related to their occupations, avocations, and lifestyle.**
- **An optometrist has completed pre-professional undergraduate education in a college or university and four years of professional education at a college of optometry, leading to the doctor of optometry (O.D.) degree. Some optometrists complete an optional residency in a specific area of practice.**
- **Optometrists are eye health care professionals state-licensed to diagnose and treat diseases and disorders of the eye and visual system.**

**-Approved by the AOA Board of Trustees, June 2012**

The National Academies of Practice expands on this definition to further elaborate how Doctors of Optometry are integrated within communities and different practice settings. This longer description, shown in Figure 2 (National Academies of Practice), also serves to highlight both the types of services and the kinds of patients for which Doctors of Optometry can be expected to serve as members of the care team.

Schools and Colleges of Optometry have been incorporating and assessing interprofessional education and collaborative clinical practice as well as the impact of integrating optometric education resources with other health professionals

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