What is a Doctor of Optometry

FACT SHEET

Doctors of optometry, America's primary eye health care providers, are the frontline of eye and vision care. They examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, they play a major role in an individual's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. They also:

- Prescribe medications, low vision rehabilitation, vision therapy, spectacle lenses, contact lenses, and perform certain laser procedures and minor surgical procedures such as removing foreign objects from the eye and cornea.

Optometry By The Numbers

270

systemic and chronic diseases can be detected through a comprehensive eye exam

99%

of the U.S. population lives in counties with a doctor of optometry and they provide two-thirds of primary eye health care

10,000+

communities nationwide, doctors of optometry are the only eye care providers

Education & Training

- After undergraduate college training, the post-graduate, doctoral-level degree program in optometry is comprised of an additional four years of extensive classroom, laboratory, and clinical training at an accredited optometry school. This education combines all phases of functional eye health care and optics with the health sciences in a unified, specialized program. Courses in pharmacology, optics, vision science, biochemistry, and systemic diseases are included.
- Optometry is one of the only doctoral-level health care professions to require continuing education in every state for license renewal.

Healthcare Costs

- In comparing the health plan reimbursement rate difference between a new patient and an established patient, there is a significant cost savings when a patient receives their eye care from the same provider that has been providing their routine care.
- When a patient receives eye care from a provider they are familiar with, they typically experience more timely treatment and fewer complications. This translates to cost savings and more rapid return to workplace productivity.

(Fact Sheet continued on next page)

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Quality Patient Care

- Eye diseases, vision loss and eye disorders create an estimated $139 billion economic burden in the U.S. and millions of Americans suffer from untreated or undiagnosed vision impairments.
- Through a comprehensive eye exam, doctors of optometry can gain insight into a person's overall health as well as determine eye and vision health. They also can identify early warning signs and manifestations of more than 270 systemic and chronic diseases including diabetes, hypertension and cancer.
- Doctors of optometry have been performing pre- and post-operative of eye surgical patients under Medicare protocols for decades.
- The average cost of an emergency room visit for an eye emergency is over $900. The vast majority of these visits can be managed by an optometrist.
- The eye related diagnosis of an emergency room physician correlates to the diagnosis of an eye doctor less than 50% of the time. Patients should see their optometrist FIRST for eye related urgencies and emergencies.

Access

- Patients enjoy greater access to the latest procedures and more immediate care since there are more doctors of optometry, especially in underserved areas, and an increasing amount of eye problems can be diagnosed and treated with one visit or without a referral.
- Greater access for patients is a great advantage for senior citizens as well, as they typically need more frequent exams and diagnostic tests or procedures and many of them find it more difficult to travel longer distances to see a doctor.