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Eyes on the Future: Exploring Career Paths in Optometry

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Eyes on the Future: Exploring Career Paths in Optometry

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Being an optometrist means helping people see better and keeping their eyes healthy. It's a career that mixes science, healthcare, and even some business skills. The field is always changing and growing with new technology, which means you'll keep learning new things throughout your career.

Optometry is often ranked as one of the best jobs in the U.S. by sources like CNNMoney, Kiplinger's, and 24/7 Wall St. It's known for being a good-paying, stable, and rewarding job.

The need for optometrists is expected to grow a lot. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says jobs in optometry will grow by 9% from 2023 to 2033—faster than most other careers. That means about 2,200 job openings every year, many of them because older optometrists are retiring or switching jobs.

Why Eye Care Is Becoming More Important

More people will need eye care in the future. This is mainly because people are living longer and are more aware of how important eye health is.

As people get older, they are more likely to have eye problems like cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration. Also, more people are getting conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, which can affect eyesight.

New technology is also changing eye care. Tools like artificial intelligence, digital imaging, and virtual appointments (tele-optometry) are helping optometrists give better, faster, and more personal care.

There's also more public awareness about how eye health affects overall health, thanks to health campaigns and better education.

Between 2020 and 2035, the number of full-time eye surgeons (ophthalmologists) in the U.S. is expected to go down by 12%, while the demand for eye care will go up by 24%. This means optometrists will have more chances to help with medical eye care and prevention.

Different Career Paths in Optometry

Optometry offers many career paths. You can choose to work in general eye care or focus on a specialty, like helping kids with vision issues, people who have suffered a concussion or some other type of traumatic brain injury or working with athletes to help them improve their performance.

What you choose might depend on your personal interests, how long you want to train, how much money you want to make, and the kind of work-life balance you're looking for.

This guidebook, created by Latinos en Optometry with support from Transitions Optical, gives a look at some of these different specialties. You'll find information about what training you need, where to learn more, and why some optometrists chose their career path.

Helpful Resources

If you're thinking about becoming an optometrist, the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) is a great place to start. You can find out how to choose the right optometry school or college for you, as well as details about the application process at https://futureeyedoc.org/ and https://optometriceducation.org/future-students/.

In addition, ASCO offers Eye Opener Sessions, which is a matching service for potential and future optometry students interested in shadowing a Doctor of Optometry during a workday, either in person or virtually, to get a better understanding of the daily life of an optometrist. Students are matched with an OD based on geographical information, common interests, and goals. You can begin the matching process at https://www.eyeopenersession.org/. Participants in the Eye Opener Sessions must be 18 or older and are prohibited from arranging or soliciting in-person meetings with minors through this platform.

A survey of 325 optometrists, called "Career Considerations in Optometry", shares what real professionals think about the profession and offers insight for about how optometry might fit into your interests, skills, career goals, and lifestyle aspirations. You can read the summary here: https://latinosenoptometry.org/students/career-considerations-in-optometry/.

To learn more about Latinos en Optometry or to become a student member for free, go to www.latinosenoptometry.org. Membership is FREE to all students interested in a career in Optometry or related eye care profession, those currently enrolled in a certified college of optometry, allied health profession, education, and rehabilitation program or in an optometric residency or a fellowship program.

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Image Courtesy of New England College of Optometry

ACADEMIC OPTOMETRIST

Academic optometrists flourish in dynamic educational and research settings, predominantly found in universities or colleges of optometry, as opposed to exclusively practicing in clinical settings. Within these environments, they assume various responsibilities, such as teaching, conducting research, providing mentorship, and actively engaging with the wider healthcare community. These diverse responsibilities are all interconnected by a common objective: to progress the knowledge and practice of eye health and vision care.

Shaping Minds, Changing Lives

Academic optometry is driven by a strong passion for teaching. Academic optometrists are responsible for developing and delivering advanced coursework, providing thought-provoking lectures, and mentoring students during their clinical rotations. They strive to ignite curiosity and instill confidence in their students, empowering them with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel as optometrists.

Deans and Presidents play a crucial role in advancing this leadership by shaping the strategic direction of academic programs, innovating curriculum development and delivery, and ensuring academic excellence throughout their institutions.

Innovating at the Forefront of Research

Academic optometrists are not only eye care practitioners but also researchers who explore new frontiers in vision science and contribute to top-tier journals. Their work involves pushing the boundaries of what can be achieved in eye care and collaborating with experts from various disciplines such as pediatricians, endocrinologists, ophthalmologists, engineers, physicists, biologists, and nutritionists to develop innovative technologies and treatments. They conduct pioneering vision research, aiming to unlock new insights that can lead to significant advancements in the field.

In addition to their research efforts, academic optometrists also play a crucial role in mentoring and supervising PhD candidates, guiding them through complex research projects with real-world applications.

Image Courtesy of New England College of Optometry

Mentorship and Leadership That Matter

Mentoring is an important aspect of the role. Academic optometrists are role models, guiding both undergraduate and postgraduate students through challenges and milestones, helping them grow personally and professionally. They are also deeply engaged with the wider community—serving on institutional committees, partnering with external organizations, and always staying ahead of emerging trends and technologies in the field.

Why choose this path?

As an academic optometrist, I get to experience the best of all worlds—I make a meaningful impact every single day, whether it's through helping a student finally master a tough concept, discovering something new in the lab, or watching graduates go on to change lives in their own communities. I enjoy the credibility and respect of being a medical professional, the joy of lifelong learning, and a career that offers both intellectual fulfillment and a healthy work-life balance.

Howard Purcell, OD, FAAO
President and CEO, New England College of Optometry Boston, MA
Co-Founder and Board Member, Latinos en Optometry
BOSTON, MA

Path to becoming an academic optometrist and career progression

It is common for academic optometrists to begin their journey in clinical practice, later transitioning to academia to share their experience and passion. Others pursue a one-year residency (the most common path) and other advanced degrees—such as a Master's or PhD in vision science, research, or a related field—to further deepen their expertise.

The potential for career growth in academia is rich with possibility. One can progress from being a lecturer to achieving the rank of full professor and even take on roles such as department chair or dean. Additionally, there are diverse opportunities for research and development within the industry, as well as options for consulting roles and leadership positions in related organizations.

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CONTACT LENS SPECIALIST

According to the National Institutes of Health, approximately 45 million people in the U.S. wear contact lenses. This represents about 1 in 6 Americans. Contact lenses correct astigmatism, nearsightedness, farsightedness, and other vision issues and are considered medical devices and require a prescription.

The global contact lens market is experiencing significant growth, with projections indicating a continued increase in demand for both standard and specialty lenses. Specialty lenses are often necessary for individuals with corneal irregularities, such as keratoconus, severe eye surface disease like dry eye, those needing to correct post-refractive surgery issues, or those who experience discomfort or ineffectiveness with conventional lenses.

Specialty lenses include toric lenses for astigmatism, scleral lenses for dry eye and corneal irregularities, and multifocal lenses for presbyopia. In addition to addressing specific conditions, specialty lenses can also serve cosmetic purposes, such as colored lenses, and improve the overall quality of life for individuals with certain visual impairments.

While all optometrists can prescribe and fit contact lenses, specialized optometrists have a deeper understanding of different types, their applications, and specific fitting challenges. They are experts in fitting and dispensing both conventional and specialty contact lenses, using advanced techniques and technology to assess the need for contact lenses, determine their

appropriateness, and prescribe and fit various types. In addition to fitting and dispensing lenses, these optometrists are skilled in diagnosing and treating eye diseases.

Training

Specialty contact lens fitting is a specialized area within optometry, often requiring a higher level of expertise. It involves dedicated training to fit and manage various types of contact lenses for complex eye conditions.

Most optometry schools offer comprehensive contact lens training as part of their curriculum with courses covering topics like lens design, fitting methods, care and handling, and patient education. Students also gain hands-on experience through supervised clinical rotations, fitting patients with various contact lens types.

Some optometry schools offer one-year residencies focused on advanced training in corneal diseases and specialty contact lenses. Residency programs, especially those focusing on cornea and contact lenses offer extensive training in fitting and managing specialty lenses. Some institutions also offer fellowships in medical contact lenses, providing advanced training in specific areas like ocular surface disease and complex refractive errors. Optometrists can also continue their education through conferences, workshops, and online courses to stay updated on the latest techniques and lens designs

Resources

Both of these resources offer free online resources, including videos and webinars.

- **Scleral Lens Education Society**
  https://sclerallens.org/
- **Gas Permeable Lens Institute**
  https://gpli.info/

Why choose this path?

Specialty lens fitting is a very rewarding and fulfilling career pathway. Aside from providing career differentiation and developing an expertise in a well-sought career path, the impact on patient's lives is beyond rewarding. With the use of various types of specialty lenses, i.e., scleral lenses, you have the ability to transform a legally blind person to almost perfect vision or someone with extreme pain, to no pain, immediately after lens application. To affect patients' lives in this manner is a privilege and for that I will always be very grateful – it is the fuel that keeps me going.

Karen G. Carrasquillo, OD, PhD
Senior VP, Clinical and Professional Affairs, BostonSight
Board Member, Latinos en Optometry
NEEDAM HEIGHTS, MA

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EMPLOYED OR INDEPENDENT OPTOMETRIST

Employed Doctor of Optometry

Being an employed optometrist of a larger organization which owns and operates optometry practices, provides the security of a regular salary, and benefits and allows the doctor to concentrate on seeing patients without the complexities of running a business. Full- or part-time employment opportunities are typically offered.

Affiliated (Independent) Doctor of Optometry

An affiliated optometrist is an independent practice owner with a well-known retail brand as their optical fulfillment partner. Affiliated doctors work in collaborative environments where they provide clinical knowledge, in partnership with the retailer's expertise, to provide patients with a complete experience of the highest quality. The retailer typically provides additional support in the form of technology, online scheduling, localized marketing, and online and social media tools to help grow the doctor's patient base.

Becoming an employed/affiliated optometrist has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, your level of success and satisfaction in this role will be influenced by what you prioritize and value in your professional life.

Pros

- Employed/affiliated optometry offers job security due to the stability provided by employment with a larger organization compared to self-employment.
- Optometrists in an employed/affiliated settings often receive a comprehensive benefits package, including health insurance, paid time off, and other perks.
- The structured environment of employed/affiliated optometry may provide a clear expectation of work and a predictable schedule for optometrists.
- There is a potential for higher earning in employed/affiliated optometry, as starting salaries can be competitive and potentially higher than in private practice.

Cons (Challenges)

- One of the disadvantages of employed/affiliated optometry is the reduced level of control that optometrists may have over various aspects of their practice, including equipment, treatments, and products.
- Employed/affiliated optometrists may experience pressure to meet a high patient volume, which can result in a more fast-paced work environment. The emphasis on patient volume may detract from the ability to provide personalized care, as there may be limited time for individualized attention.
- Additionally, employed/affiliated optometrists may have limited opportunities for entrepreneurship, as they do not have the ability to establish their own practice and become independent business owners.

Resources

- **American Association of Corporate Optometrists (AACO)**
  https://www.aacoeyes.org/

  AACO was started in 2013 by a small steering group of Optometrists that served on a Walmart advisory board. They decided to create an organization that is inclusive of all retail brands and includes both practice owners and employed optometrists.

Why choose this path?

My childhood goal was to become a doctor; I just didn't know what kind. Learning about optometry from an article in US News and World Report, I was not aware of this profession. To learn more, I took a position as an optician/optometric tech to work throughout college.

For those who are seeing the world for the first time, to those who have seen the world change over time, optometry has given me the means to impact how people see their world. Almost 3 decades later, I have cared for patients as a corporate optometrist, independent optometrist affiliated with a retail chain, traditional private practice owner, and industry consultant. What impact do you wish to make on the world?

Michael A. Slusky, OD, F.A.A.O.
VENICE, FL

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GERIATRIC OPTOMETRIST

Health care advances have allowed older people to live longer, more active lives. However, the elderly are increasingly impacted by age-related diseases, including specific ocular conditions that can result in disability and blindness. As individuals grow older, it becomes increasingly important to prioritize their eye care to maintain optimal eye health.

There is no exact age that defines someone as 'geriatric,' but it is generally understood that individuals over 65 are often considered older adults. It's important to note that geriatrics is not solely defined by age, as some people younger than 65 may require geriatric care due to specific medical conditions or disabilities.

About Geriatric Optometry

Geriatric optometry is a specialized field within optometry that focuses on addressing the eye health and vision needs of older individuals. Geriatric optometrists conduct comprehensive eye exams specifically designed to identify age-related factors that may lead to vision loss or eye diseases.

In addition to typical optometric practices, geriatric optometrists also assess health and eye problems that are more common in older individuals, such as cataracts, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy. Geriatric optometrists may also be involved in low vision rehabilitation, helping patients with vision loss adapt to their limited vision and

maximize their functional abilities. They also refer patients to ophthalmologists for glaucoma or cataract surgery, retina detachment repair, and help co-manage conditions related to systemic disease.

Beyond addressing eye conditions, geriatric optometrists also evaluate vision for driving, offer guidance on proper nutrition, and implement measures for fall prevention to support the overall well-being of older patients. Geriatric eye examinations also can detect larger health issues such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, and some types of cancer.

Specializing in healthcare for elderly patients requires a specific type of practitioner. Geriatric optometrists possess empathy, patience, and sensitivity to handle challenging cases. Elderly patients often need more than just eyeglasses or contact lenses. Similar to providers for pediatric patients, geriatric optometrists must address other age-related concerns during exams.

Why choose this path?

When I first graduated optometry school and became a licensed optometrist, I began my career providing primary vision care, examining, diagnosing and treating vision problems. I soon discovered that there was much more to what I could do in this profession. Although I continued to provide services in my private practice, I also became staff allied physician for several rehabilitation hospitals and clinics, providing evaluation, diagnoses and direct rehabilitative treatment for patients who had suffered traumatic brain injury (head injuries from accidents, concussions, strokes, and other neurological conditions affecting vision).

Optometry has allowed me to provide comprehensive vision care for individuals from infancy all the way through those in their senior years. It could be something as straightforward as providing glasses or contacts for a child, by allowing them to see and do well in school or sports or to evaluate, manage and guide patients who have visual impairments that result from diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, or glaucoma. Optometry is a profession that provides so many opportunities to improve quality of life. Make a difference in people's lives by choosing optometry.

Eric T. Ikeda, OD
BELLFLOWER, CA

Training

Geriatric optometry training involves a blend of foundational optometry education, specialized coursework, and practical experience focused on the unique needs of elderly patients. This includes specific courses on the aging eye, geriatric ocular diseases, and the interplay between systemic health and vision.

Students and residents typically participate in clinical rotations in geriatric optometry settings, gaining practical experience in diagnosing, treating, and managing vision problems in older adults. These residencies can last for one year or longer. The schools and colleges of optometry offer residency programs in many different areas of emphasis. More information about these areas of emphasis can be found on the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry website at https://optometriceducation.org/current-students/residency-programs/asco-residency-titles-and-descriptions/

Even after completing training, optometrists can participate in ongoing continuing education programs to stay abreast of the latest advancements in geriatric optometry and best practices for caring for older adults. This can include attending conferences, workshops, and continuing education courses.

Opportunities

Currently, there is no specific data on the number of geriatric optometrists in the U.S. Nonetheless, there is a rising demand for eye care professionals who comprehend the unique requirements of the aging demographic.

According to the World Health Organization, by 2030, 1 in 6 people in the world will be aged 60 years or over. At this time the share of the population aged 60 years and over will increase from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion. By 2050, the world's population of people aged 60 years and older will double (2.1 billion). The number of persons aged 80 years or older is expected to triple between 2020 and 2050 to reach 426 million.

Resources

There isn't a single, formally recognized "Geriatric Optometry Association" as a distinct organization. However, the following organizations address geriatric optometry through various means:

- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**
  https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health

  The AOA has sections and resources dedicated to the care of older adults, including Low Vision and Geriatric Ocular Disease.

- **American Academy of Optometry**
  https://aaopt.org/membership/sections-special-interest-groups-alt/via-sig/

  The AAO has a special interest group focused on Vision in Aging.

- **American Geriatrics Society (AGS)**
  https://www.americangeriatrics.org/

  The AGS is another organization that works to improve the health and quality of life for older adults. They also offer resources.

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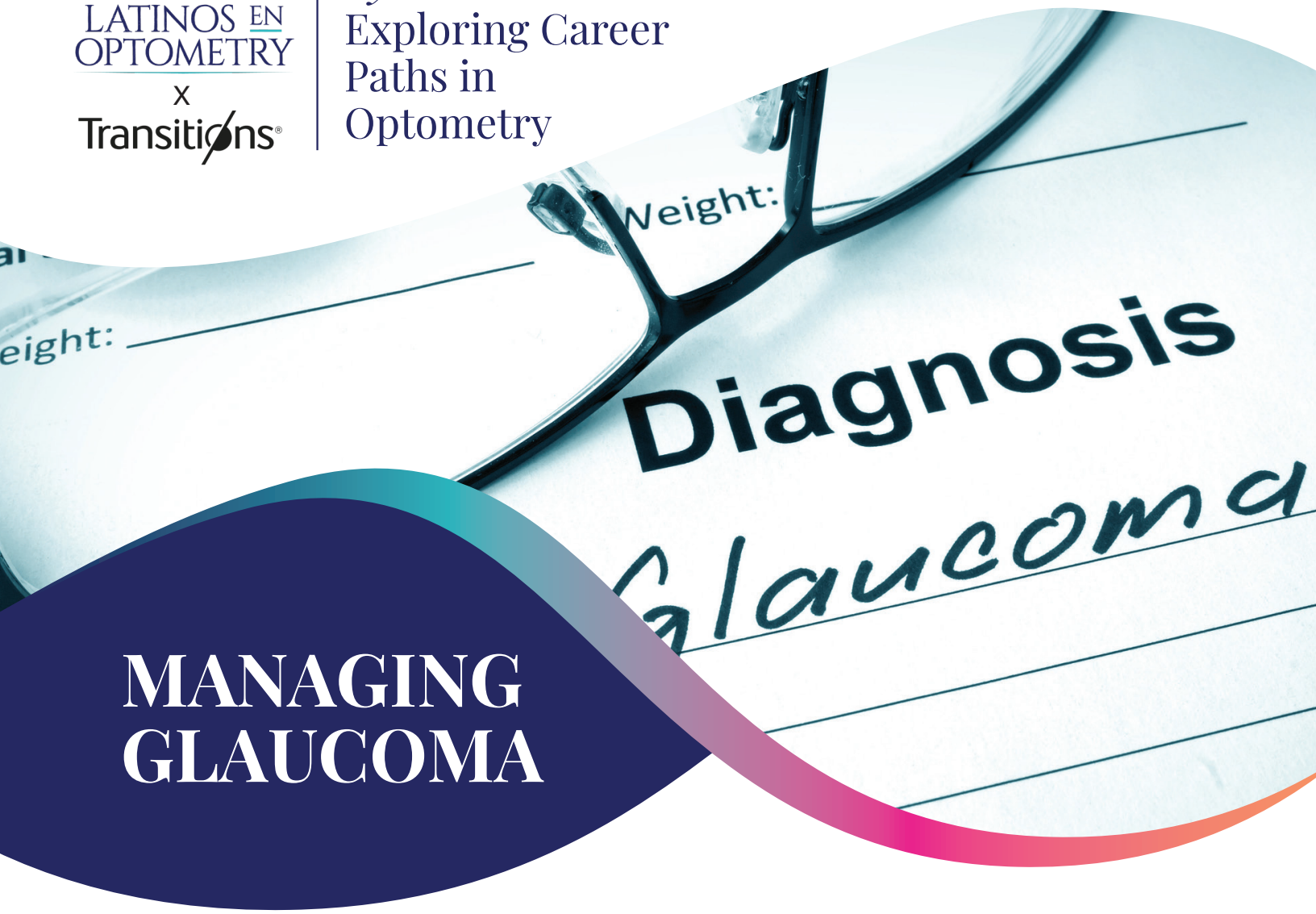

MANAGING GLAUCOMA

Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness in the United States and worldwide. Glaucoma is an eye disease that damages the optic nerve and can result in blindness and vision loss. Early detection and treatment can protect your eyes against serious vision loss.

Part of every comprehensive eye exam includes measurement of eye pressure and an examination of the optic nerve. With the results of the exam, optometrists are able to make an initial assessment and can determine whether a patient has glaucoma.

An optometrist can determine the specific stage of the disease, estimate the risk for vision loss and blindness and decide whether to initiate treatment. He/She can prescribe oral medications in addition to the topical ophthalmic medication.

Optometrists may also perform laser procedures, depending on their training and state regulations.

Managing glaucoma requires specialized knowledge and skills. The level of involvement of each optometrist in treating this condition may differ based on their individual training and experience. Some optometrists have pursued supplementary training and certification specifically dedicated to managing glaucoma patients. Additionally, some optometrists work in collaboration with ophthalmologists in the care of glaucoma patients, enabling the sharing of expertise and the establishment of referral networks.

Training

Optometrists can receive specialized training to manage glaucoma through various courses, certifications, and fellowships. This training equips them with the knowledge and skills to diagnose, manage, and potentially treat glaucoma patients, often in collaboration with ophthalmologists.

Many optometry schools offer advanced courses and certificate programs in glaucoma. Optometrists can also pursue additional coursework and training in glaucoma specifically, such as instructive and clinical courses. Some states offer certification programs for optometrists who complete specific training requirements in glaucoma.

To gain a deeper understanding of disease management, pursuing an optometric residency after completing your education is highly recommended. There are numerous disease-based residencies offered in various practice settings, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs in VA hospitals, combined optometry/ophthalmology practices, and private practice optometry clinics. These residencies provide optometrists with the opportunity to gain valuable experience with complex cases, which in turn enhances their diagnostic abilities and knowledge of patient management.

Resources

- **Optometric Glaucoma Society (OGS)**
  https://optometricglaucomasociety.org/

  The OGS is an organization, composed of optometrists, ophthalmologists, and scientists, promotes excellence in glaucoma care through professional education, scientific investigation, and collaboration. The OGS aims to educate optometrists about glaucoma, advance knowledge through research, and disseminate information to healthcare providers and the public.

- **Optometric Glaucoma Foundation (OGF)**
  https://glaucomafoundation.org

  The OGF supports glaucoma education and research through grants, scholarships, and other initiatives. The Glaucoma Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of people with glaucoma. The Foundation works to encourage and support basic and applied research in glaucoma with a goal of preserving and restoring vision.

Why choose this path?

As an optometrist with a passion for ocular disease, I've found my passion to be in managing chronic and progressive conditions like glaucoma and dry eye disease. These are more than just eye issues—they're quality-of-life issues. Being able to provide long-term care, education, and innovative treatment options to patients is incredibly rewarding.

What drew me to this specialty was the opportunity to combine patient-centered care with advanced diagnostics and clinical problem-solving. And what has kept me inspired is the diversity of paths this career offers. From private practice to multidisciplinary clinics, and from research to industry, optometry allows you to explore beyond the exam lane.

For students thinking about a future in health care, optometry—offers a dynamic, meaningful, and flexible career.

Leslie O'Dell, OD, F.A.A.O.
YORK, PA

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LOW VISION OPTOMETRIST

Low vision refers to impaired vision that cannot be fully corrected with glasses, surgery, or medication. It can manifest with various symptoms and stem from a range of causes, including eye diseases, injuries, or congenital defects. Common causes of low vision include age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts, stroke, brain tumors, traumatic brain injury and diabetic retinopathy.

Most eye doctors define low vision as moderate to severe visual impairment, which can significantly hinder everyday activities such as driving and reading. Low vision can encompass various types of visual impairment, including not only nearsightedness or farsightedness, but also peripheral and central vision loss, blind spots, and blurred vision. It is possible to have adequate sight vision but still have difficulty using the vision to do daily activities of living.

Some optometrists specialize in low-vision rehabilitation. Low vision rehabilitation is a comprehensive approach designed to assist individuals with reduced vision in maintaining their independence and quality of life.

Optometrists focusing on low vision collaborate with patients to identify the impact of vision loss on daily activities and create personalized rehabilitation plans based on individual needs and visual abilities. Their goal

is to enhance the ability to read, cook, drive, navigate their environment and participate in other activities. Additionally, optometrists offer counseling and support to help individuals cope with the emotional and psychological impact of vision loss and connect them with relevant resources such as a certified vision rehabilitation therapist, an occupational therapist, a social worker or therapist, and support groups.

Training

Low vision training for optometrists can involve specialized education and training programs designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills to provide comprehensive low vision care. These programs often include educational instruction, hands-on clinical experience, and post-training support to help optometrists integrate low vision services into their practice.

Why choose this path?

Having been a private optometrist for 45 years, I have seen tremendous changes in the field. Optometry has really blossomed in ways that one would never have imagined. The opportunities are available to help improve the lives of many patients that are struggling not only to see to do their daily living skills, but also to interact with the world.

There are some very specialized areas within optometry including low vision and neuro vision that delve into complex conditions, such as vision impairments from brain injury and ocular disease. I have the opportunity to see these patients early on in the hospital setting and then continue to follow their progress in private practice.

The bottom line is that there is a major shortage of optometrists that are involved in these specialized fields. The aging person and the general declining health of our population has set up a playing field that is screaming for optometrists to become involved in low vision care and vision rehabilitation. It is time to reach out and learn what optometry has to offer.

Carl Garbus, OD
VALENCIA, CA

Resources

- **Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)**
  https://optometriceducation.org/

  ASCO provides information on low vision education and training. ASCO-affiliated schools offer residency programs that include comprehensive training in low vision rehabilitation, covering clinical rotations, didactic learning, and community outreach.

- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**
  https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/caring-for-your-eyes/low-vision-and-vision-rehab

- **American Academy of Optometry (AAOpt)**
  https://aaopt.org/membership/sections-special-interest-groups-alt/low-vision-section/

  The AAOpt's Low Vision Section is dedicated to promoting excellence in patient care and providing valuable resources for low vision rehabilitation.

- **International Academy of Low Vision Specialists (IALVS)**
  https://ialvs.com/

  IALVS is focused on advancing low vision care through education and collaboration.

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MYOPIA MANAGEMENT

Myopia, also known as nearsightedness, causes distant objects to appear blurry while close objects remain clear. This condition occurs when the eye is unable to properly focus light on the retina, often due to an elongated eyeball or a highly curved cornea.

Myopia is becoming more widespread in the United States, especially among children. Estimates indicate that approximately 36.1% of the US population, which is around 19.5 million children, are currently affected by myopia. The prevalence of myopia is higher in urban areas at 41% compared to 15.7% in rural areas. Globally, myopia is also increasing, and projections suggest that almost 50% of the world's population will have myopia by 2050.

Estimates indicated that approximately

36.1%

of the U.S. population, around 19.5 million children are currently affected by myopia.

Myopia management by eyecare professionals aims to slow down the progression of nearsightedness in children and young adults, especially during the developmental years. Optometrists provide interventions such as specialized contact lenses (such as ortho-k and daily disposable dual-focal lenses), myopia management glasses (specialized spectacle lenses designed to slow down the progression of nearsightedness, particularly in children. They are not

available in the US), and low-dose atropine eye drops. These interventions aim to prevent or reduce the adverse effects of *high myopia*, which can increase the risk of developing other eye conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts, myopic macular degeneration, and retinal detachment.

Training

Many optometry schools now incorporate myopia management into their curriculum, providing students with the necessary tools and knowledge to manage myopia.

Practicing optometrists can pursue continuing education opportunities in myopia management, such as workshops, conferences, and online courses, to stay updated with the latest advancements. They can also utilize online resources and journals to further their knowledge. Seeking guidance from experienced optometrists successful in myopia management can offer valuable insights and support. Building relationships with ophthalmologists and other pediatric healthcare providers can facilitate effective co-management of myopic patients.

Resources

- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**
  https://www.aoa.org/

  AOA is deeply involved in myopia management and serves as a leading advocate for quality eye care. They offer resources such as the Myopia Management Guidelines and the Children's Vision Toolkit to support Doctors of Optometry.

- **World Council of Optometry (WCO)**
  https://worldcouncilofoptometry.info/

  WCO supports global efforts to raise awareness and promote public health initiatives related to myopia, particularly in children. They host the Global Myopia Awareness Coalition (GMAC), a collaborative effort to address the growing issue of myopia worldwide.

- **American Academy of Optometry (AAO)**
  https://aaopt.org/

  AAO promotes excellence in optometry and provides educational resources and special interest groups, including one focused on myopia management.

Why choose this path?

I chose this path because it is incredibly rewarding. I truly believe I can make a meaningful difference in my patients' lives—myopia management allows me to reduce the risk of vision-threatening complications associated with high myopia later in life, which is both impactful and fulfilling. Additionally, treatments like Ortho-K and daily disposable dual-focal lenses improve my patients' quality of life and enhance their self-esteem.

On a personal note, I love working with children. They are full of energy, curiosity, and potential. I see them as our future doctors, engineers, lawyers, and leaders—the future of our generation. Being able to support their vision and overall well-being from a young age is a privilege and one of the most meaningful aspects of my work.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh, OD
Board Member, Latinos en Optometry
MIAMI, FL

NEURO OPTOMETRIC REHABILITATION OPTOMETRIST

Visual problems are often overlooked during initial treatment of a brain injury and in some cases; symptoms may not be present until sometime following the injury. A standard eye examination by an optometrist or ophthalmologist may not fully reveal the extent of the impact on the visual process.

People who have suffered a neurological insult, like a concussion, and are encountering visual symptoms, can find value in undergoing a vision assessment by a Neuro-Optometric Rehabilitation Optometrist. This specialized eye care professional focuses on diagnosing, treating, and rehabilitating neurological conditions that have a negative impact on the visual system.

Neuro-optometry examines not just the quality of vision, but also how vision is impacted by neurological events like traumatic brain injury or concussion. It also focuses on conditions like multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, Parkinson's disease, and cerebrovascular accidents (strokes). Additionally, neuro-optometry addresses other conditions that can advance to affect the nervous system, such as Lyme disease. Neuro-Optometric Rehabilitation Optometrists also collaborate with a range of other rehabilitation team members, including neurologists, rehabilitation physicians, nurses, physical and occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, neuropsychologists, and audiologists.

Training and Resources

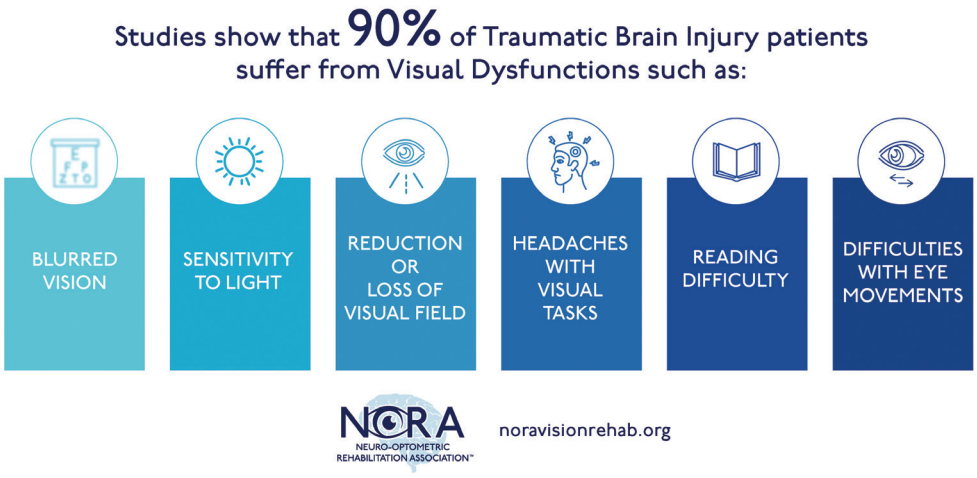
Neuro-optometry is a highly specialized field that requires continuous learning and development. This involves attending conferences, keeping up with specialized literature, and engaging in networking opportunities with other professionals in the field.

Once you have obtained your license as an optometrist, you have the opportunity to specialize in neuro-optometry. One way to do this is by seeking mentorship from an experienced neuro-optometrist who can guide you in this specialized field. Another option is to pursue fellowships provided by reputable organizations such as:

- **Neuro-Optometric Rehabilitation Association (NORA)**
  noravisionrehab.org
- **Optometric Vision Development & Rehabilitation Association (OVDRA)**
  https://www.covd.org/

These fellowships can offer valuable training and experience to further develop your expertise in neuro-optometry.

Note: These credentialing programs can take anywhere from 4 to 10 years to complete for fellowship status.



Opportunity

The field of Neuro-optometry is experiencing growth and expansion due to increasing knowledge about vision and its connection to other brain functions. In addition to offering patients rehabilitation therapy and neuro-optometric vision rehabilitation, there are opportunities to contribute to the progress of neuro-optometry. Researchers in this field are actively investigating the correlation between vision and brain function, with the goal of creating groundbreaking rehabilitation and treatment approaches for a range of conditions.

Why choose this path?

What drew me to neuro-optometry—and what keeps me inspired every day—is the chance to help people in truly life-changing ways. When someone has a brain injury or neurological condition, it can disrupt not only how they see, but how they function in everyday life. Being able to restore visual processing and give someone back their confidence, independence, or athletic performance is incredibly rewarding.

I've also had the opportunity to collaborate with professionals across medicine, rehabilitation, and sports—creating multidisciplinary care teams that help patients heal faster and more completely. This field is constantly evolving, and every day is a chance to learn, innovate, and make a real difference.

DeAnn Fitzgerald, OD
Immediate Past President, Neuro-Optometric Rehabilitation Association
CEDAR RAPIDS, IA

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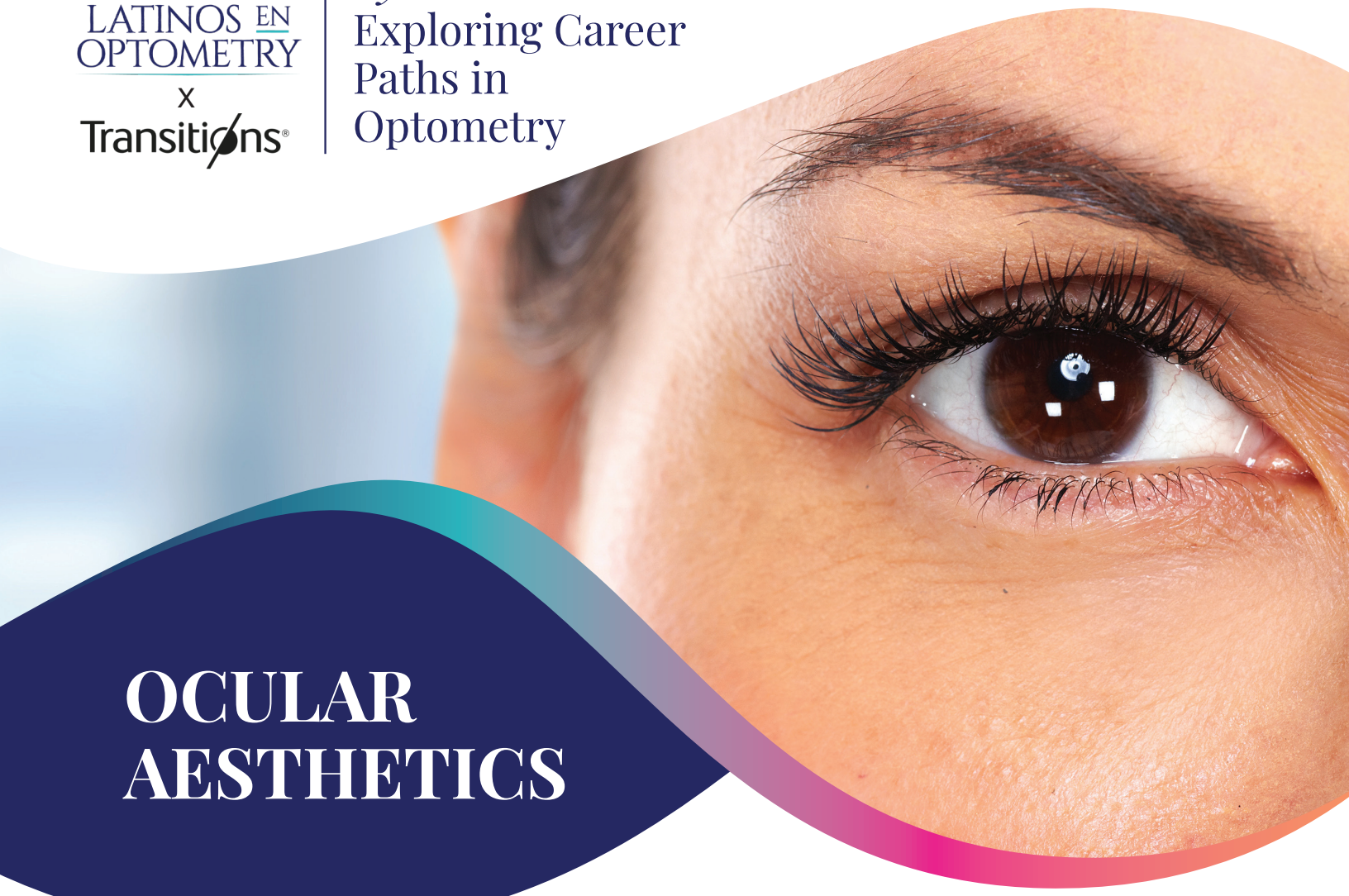

OCULAR AESTHETICS

Optometrists offer medical eyecare and refractive services to protect patients' vision and enhance their quality of life. In some cases, patients want something more–to look as good as they see. Cosmetic optometry, also known as ocular aesthetics, caters to this need by providing cosmetic improvements to the eye area, allowing practitioners to offer an additional, sought-after service.

Optometry has been involved in the cosmetic industry for many years. Optometrists help patients select frames that complement their faces and/or fit them in contact lenses, enhancing both their vision and appearance. If patients are not interested in glasses or contact lenses, optometrists can discuss refractive surgery and other alternatives to free patients from the need to wear glasses.

Optometrists are increasingly integrating cosmetic procedures into their practices to provide a wider array of services for their patients. With their specialized knowledge of the eye and eyelid area, optometrists are well-positioned to offer advice on cosmetics and provide ocular aesthetic services.

Ocular aesthetics covers a wide range of services, including basic skin care and makeup advice, as well as advanced treatments like laser procedures, neurotoxins, and dermal fillers. These services can be offered in conjunction with other optometry services, such as dry eye management or vision correction, providing a more comprehensive approach to patient care. Ocular

aesthetics can also be part of a broader anti-aging approach, with optometrists helping address concerns related to aging.

Ocular aesthetics involves more than just treatments; it includes educating patients about the safety of procedures and products used in eye makeup and skincare. Education and guidance from optometrists can assist patients in making informed decisions about cosmetic procedures and products, reducing potential risks and maximizing the benefits of aesthetic enhancements.

Training

Optometrists can integrate ocular aesthetics into their practices by undergoing continuous training, with a focus on specific techniques and procedures. Websites like YourSpark.com provide resources and articles to assist in understanding facial anatomy, fillers, and neurotoxins. Additionally, OD's can join the American Association of Aesthetic Medicine and Surgery (aaams.net) for updates on the latest skin care and beauty trends, as well as information on areas like facial anatomy, neurophysiology, and injectable techniques.

Some states may mandate additional training or certification for specific cosmetic procedures. For example, optometrists may be required to undergo specialized training or demonstrate proficiency in procedures such as laser treatments or injection techniques. In certain states, optometrists may be obligated to work under the supervision of a medical doctor (MD) or in collaboration with other healthcare professionals when performing certain cosmetic procedures.

Resources

There isn't a single, formally recognized "Cosmetic Optometry" as a distinct organization. However, the following organization addresses ocular aesthetics:

- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**
  https://www.aoa.org/

  The AOA and its affiliated state organizations provide relevant information and resources for optometrists on aesthetic aspects of eye care, such as counseling patients about cosmetic products and procedures, and promoting safe makeup habits.

Why choose this path?

My decision to pursue optometry was driven by a deep desire to protect and enhance one of the most vital senses—vision. Over the years, I've come to realize that vision care is not only about clarity of sight, but also about helping patients feel confident and empowered in their appearance. As I began working more closely with patients, it became evident that many were seeking more than functional vision—they were seeking a reflection of themselves that matched how they felt inside. Ocular aesthetics became the perfect extension of the care I was already providing.

Integrating aesthetics into my practice has allowed me to support patients in a more complete way. I'm able to educate them on safe cosmetic choices, treat both medical and cosmetic concerns, and provide solutions that go beyond seeing well—to looking and feeling their best. This path merges the scientific precision of eye care with the artistry of aesthetics, offering a unique opportunity to elevate my role as a healthcare provider. Choosing ocular aesthetics has reignited my passion for patient care, giving me the tools to impact not just how people see, but how they see themselves.

Gabriela Olivares, OD
PEMBROKE PINES, FL

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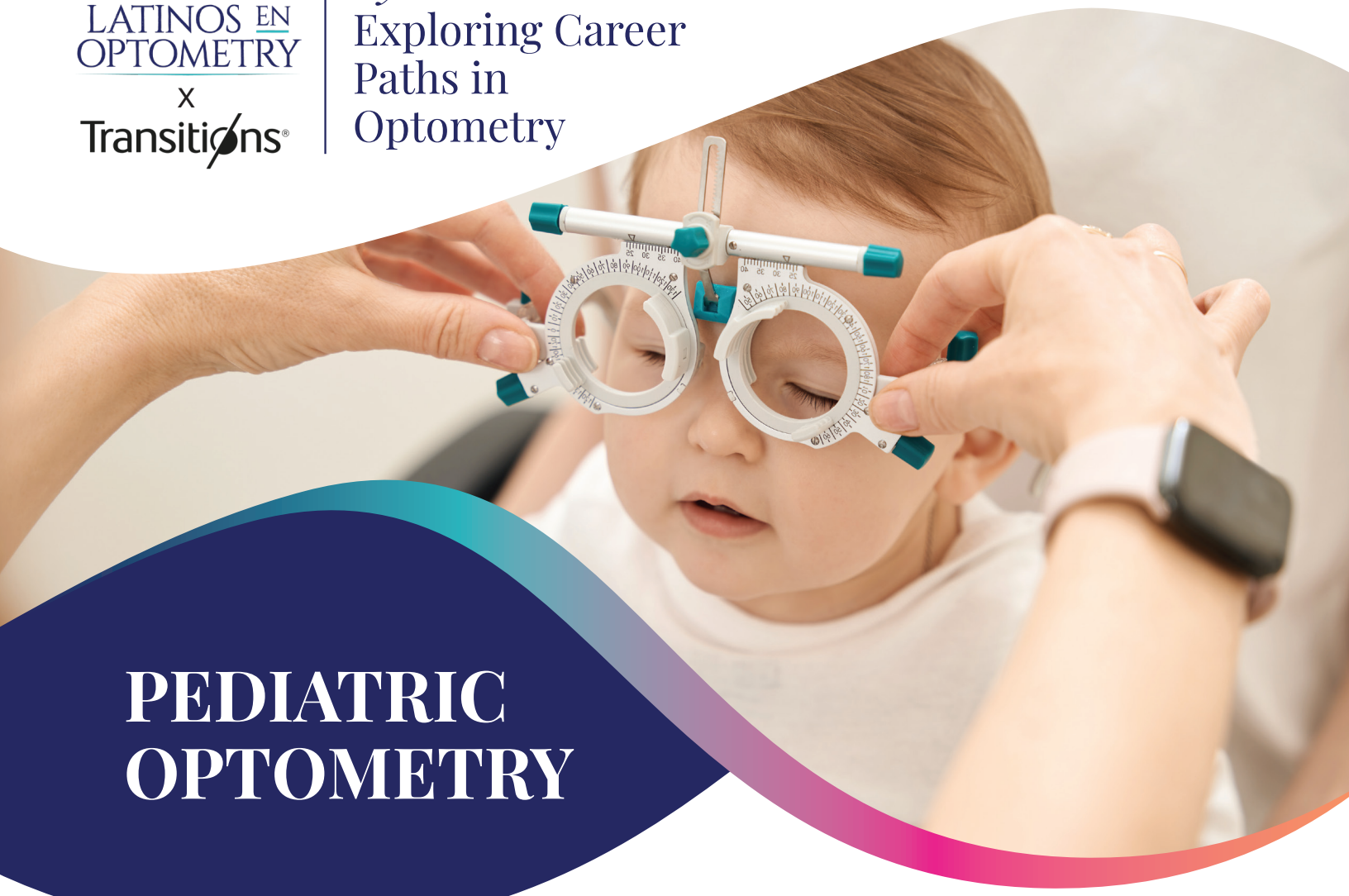

PEDIATRIC OPTOMETRY

Early detection and treatment of vision problems are crucial for a child's development and overall well-being. The American Optometric Association recommends comprehensive eye exams for children at 6 months, 3 years, and at the start of school, with annual exams thereafter, or more frequently if needed.

Vision conditions are common in children. Approximately 10% of preschoolers have a vision condition, while one in four school-age children need eyeglasses to see the blackboard or to read a book. Fortunately, most common vision conditions can be treated effectively with appropriate care and follow-up.

In preschool and school-age children, untreated vision problems can impact success at school, reading ability, connecting with friends and performance in sports. In infants and toddlers, vision is crucial for social, motor, language development, as children learn to respond to their mother or father's smile, move towards toys and mimic facial expressions. Vision conditions such as amblyopia, if not treated before school-age, can even lead to permanent vision loss. This means that early detection, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of a child's vision condition are critical.

Pediatric optometrists specialize in children's vision and eye health and have additional training, education, and experience working with kids. They provide specialized

care for children with unique eye health needs, including vision care for special health care needs children such as those with Down syndrome or on the autism spectrum, nonverbal children, premature infants, and children with low vision or cortical blindness, a condition where the brain's ability to process visual information is impaired, leading to vision loss despite normal eye function.

Similar to general optometrists, pediatric optometrists perform thorough eye examinations, provide prescriptions for corrective lenses (eyeglasses and contact lenses), and diagnose and treat various eye problems and vision conditions. They are trained to recognize subtle signs of eye problems in infants and young children that may go unnoticed by parents and employ specialized techniques and tools to assess a child's vision development and detect any potential issues.

Resources

- **American Academy of Optometry (AAO)**
  https://aaopt.org/

  The AAO offers a broad range of educational resources, including a dedicated section for pediatric and binocular vision.

- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**
  https://www.aoa.org/

  The AOA supports optometrists with advocacy, professional development and educational tools tailored to a wide range of specialties, including pediatric optometry. There are a number of tools available to ODs, such as the AOA Vision Therapy Task Force, which promotes awareness and understanding of this specialty for not only AOA members but also the general public and other professionals.

Providing pediatric care necessitates a high level of patience, creativity, and the skill to establish a connection with young patients, who may not always be capable of expressing their symptoms. It is important for pediatric care providers to have the ability to recognize and interpret non-verbal cues and signs in children who may have difficulty communicating their discomfort. Pediatric care providers need to have the capacity to adapt their communication style to suit the developmental stage and individual needs of each child.

Training

Once you have obtained your optometry degree, pursuing a one-year residency in pediatric optometry can be highly effective for gaining specialized, hands-on experience. These residency programs offer advanced competency post-doctoral clinical and classroom training in Pediatric Optometry. Pediatric Optometry residency programs may provide clinical training in areas such as comprehensive pediatric eye care managing common childhood vision conditions, pediatric contact lenses, myopia control, providing care to children with special health care needs, and vision therapy. The residents may provide care in clinics affiliated with the schools and colleges of Optometry, community settings,

private practices or hospital-based settings. In these settings pediatric optometry residents may provide care and learn alongside pediatric ophthalmology fellows, fostering a strong working relationship.

Furthermore, participating in a pediatric residency program provides valuable exposure to working with diverse pediatric populations, enabling optometrists to develop the essential skills needed to address the unique challenges of treating young patients. Pediatric Optometrists often collaborate with other professionals who advocate for children such as medical, school health and educational professions, as well as occupational, physical and speech therapists.

Why choose this path?

As a pediatric optometrist, I truly feel like I get to be part of something special. I have the opportunity to provide eye care for kids at the Charles River Community Health Center in Brighton, MA. What I love most about working here is the collaborative environment—optometry, medicine, dentistry, and behavioral health all work together to care for our pediatric patients. This team-based approach allows us to deliver the best, most holistic care possible to kids, especially those who are at higher risk. My main goal is to remove any visual barriers that might hold them back from learning, helping them thrive academically and live healthier lives.

In addition to patient care, I also have the privilege of mentoring future optometrists, both in the clinic and in the classroom. It's incredibly rewarding to guide the next generation of professionals. I also conduct pediatric research and advocate for children through my work with public health organizations.

Stacy Ayn Lyons, OD, FAAO
Professor and Chair, Specialty Care and Vision Sciences Department, New England College of Optometry
BOSTON, MA

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SPORTS VISION

Vision, just like speed and strength, is a critical component in how well you play any sport. In sports, vision has the potential to impact an athlete's overall performance, including clarity of sight, motor performance (the ability to perform specific tasks), and information processing (how you analyze, interpret, and use information).

Sports Vision, the science of helping athletes reach peak levels of performance through the enhancement of visual skills, is becoming more and more important in training individuals of many sports. Through sports vision tests and training, athletes can assess the performance of their eyes beyond the standard ability to see letters and objects clearly on an eye chart. Sports vision training can help them improve their awareness and perception, react faster, and make more accurate decisions in the sports they play. Athletes who use their visual system to its maximum potential will gain optimal performance and a competitive edge.

Numerous studies have confirmed the potential for visual abilities to be strengthened and improved through specific visual training methods. Optometrists specializing in sports vision can help enhance an athlete's performance by identifying and addressing visual weaknesses that might impact their ability to react, focus, and track moving objects. Optometrists with expertise in sports vision often collaborate with other professionals such as ophthalmologists, athletic trainers and coaches.

Training

Becoming a sports vision optometrist involves a strong foundation in optometry, followed by specialized training and education in the unique visual demands of various sports. This training helps optometrists develop personalized programs to improve athletic performance by optimizing the communication between the athlete's eyes and brain. Some optometry schools offer specialized training in sports vision. Many optometrists pursue sports vision training through continuing education courses, seminars, and conferences.

Opportunity

Vision is a crucial factor in sports performance, alongside speed and strength. Many athletes, regardless of age or skill level, are increasingly turning to sports vision training to enhance their visual abilities and ultimately perform better. Optometrists who specialize in sports vision can offer valuable expertise as consultants and serve as directors of performance vision for athletes. Similar to how teams enlist coaches for strength, speed, and nutrition, having a dedicated vision coach can give athletes and teams a competitive edge by improving sport-specific visual skills.

Resources

- **International Sports Vision Association (ISVA)**
  www.sportsvision.pro

  ISVA is an interdisciplinary group of professionals dedicated to advancing the field of vision training for athletes of all ages and levels to help them achieve peak athletic performance. It's a great resource for learning more about sports vision. Membership is free for any student in a professional degree program or resident in a post-graduate program.

- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**
  www.aoa.org

  AOA provides resources and networking opportunities.

Why choose this path?

Every time I step on the field or into the exam room with an athlete, I'm reminded why I chose this path...and why I'd choose it all over again. As a sports vision optometrist, I get to help athletes see, react, and perform better, but even more importantly, I get to protect them and keep them doing what they love. I've worked with everyone from wide-eyed Little Leaguers to seasoned professionals, and the excitement never fades when an athlete tells me they saw the ball sooner, made a quicker decision, or just felt more in control. This field has given me a front-row seat to human potential, and I'd love to see more future doctors discover the same fulfillment. If you're drawn to both the science of vision and the heart of sports, this is a career where you can truly make a difference and love what you do!

Amanda Nanasy, OD
Director, Florida Institute of Sports Vision @ The Eye Center

Chair, American Optometric Association, Sports and Performance Vision Board

PEMBROKE PINES, FL

Latinos en Optometry seeks to gain a broader representation of Latinos within the optometry and larger eye care professional community, along with increasing eye care professional knowledge and understanding of unique cultural differences within the Latino communities they serve.

Racial and ethnic diversity among health professionals promotes better access to health care, improves health care quality for underserved populations, and better meets the health care needs of our increasingly diverse population.

To learn more about Latinos en Optometry or to become a student member for free, go to www.latinosenoptometry.org. Membership is FREE to all students interested in a career in Optometry or related eye care profession, those currently enrolled in a certified college of optometry, allied health profession, education, and rehabilitation program or in an optometric residency or a fellowship program.

Transitions Optical, a part of the EssilorLuxottica group, has been pioneering light modulation for more than 30 years. With over 1,400 patents and patent applications, today it is the leading brand of the dynamic lenses category recommended by eyecare professionals worldwide and worn by more than 60 million people. *Transitions®* features a full portfolio of light-responsive lenses that seamlessly adapt to changing light situations, from clear indoor to dark outdoors.

As part of its ongoing commitment to inclusive eyecare, Transitions Optical established the Optical Advancement Board—a diverse group of practicing optometrists, ophthalmologists and opticians. The Board is dedicated to expanding access to educational opportunities for students and eyecare professionals (ECPs), while also advancing access to quality eyecare for all. In addition, it focuses on increasing diverse representation within the eyecare industry and helps develop new tools and programs that empower ECPs to deliver exceptional, equitable care to every patient.

Learn more at Transitions.com and TransitionsPRO.com/Multicultural.