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OVERVIEW

This module provides an introduction to the various categories of eye care providers and the scope of their training and responsibilities. Descriptions of the types of exams (medical vs. routine), ancillary services offered by the ophthalmic practice, surgical facilities, and surgical procedures are included to familiarize you with an overview of the responsibilities of eye care providers and their staff.

THREE O’S IN EYE CARE

A comprehensive eye care delivery system includes the diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases, the prescription of corrective lenses (glasses and contact lenses), and surgical treatment. These services are provided by a team of licensed eye care professionals, commonly known as the “Three Os” – ophthalmologist, optometrist, and optician. A description of the “Three Os” in eye care follows:

1. **Ophthalmologist**

The Ophthalmologist is a licensed doctor of medicine (M.D.) or osteopathy (D.O.) who specializes in the diagnosis and medical and surgical treatment of conditions and diseases of the eye. The ophthalmologist has completed four years of undergraduate education, four years of medical school, a year of internship, and three to four years of hospital-based residency. The ophthalmologist may receive further training by completing an additional year of fellowship training to specialize in a specific area of eye care, such as:

- Retina
- Cornea
- Neuro-Ophthalmology
- Pediatrics
- Glaucoma
- Oculoplastics
- Refractive
- Ocular Pathology

**Scope of Practice:**

- Diagnoses and treats diseases of the eyes.
- Prescribes both topical and systemic medications to medically treat eye disease.
- Performs eye surgery, both invasive and non-invasive.
- Determines the need for corrective lenses (glasses and contact lenses).

2. **Optometrist**

The Optometrist is an eye care provider trained in the diagnosis and medical treatment of conditions and diseases of the eye. The optometrist has undergone four years of undergraduate school, four years of optometric post-graduate education, and one or more years of clinical residency.

**Scope of Practice:**

- 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.
- Determine the need for corrective lenses (glasses and contact lenses).
- Evaluate patients for surgery when appropriate and often manage patients’ care pre- and post-operatively.
Scope of Practice

3. Optician

The **Optician** is a licensed or certified professional who has at least three years of on-the-job apprenticeship or two years of college or university training. Licensure and certification requirements vary according to state laws.

**Scope of Practice:**

- Fabricates, fits, adjusts, and dispenses glasses and other optical devices (contact lenses) based on the written prescription of an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

**ROUTINE VS. MEDICAL EXAMS**

In an ophthalmology office, there may be two primary types of examinations, based on a patient’s reason for the visit.

1. A patient may be seen for a routine exam with no specific medical reason other than a check to see if glasses or contact lenses need to be prescribed or changed in strength. This type of exam includes all of the elements of a medical eye exam and may be performed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist. This visit may be covered under a vision care plan, but most likely is not covered under major medical insurance.

2. A medical eye exam is an exam that is scheduled for a particular medical reason or complaint. It may or may not include dilation, but would most likely result in a medical diagnosis and treatment plan. This type of exam could be performed by either the optometrist or the ophthalmologist and may be covered under major medical insurance.

**CONTACT LENSES/GLASSES**

Ophthalmologists and optometrists prescribe glasses and/or contact lenses to correct refractive errors such as myopia, hyperopia, presbyopia, and astigmatism. When glasses or contacts are prescribed, the goal is usually to achieve better vision for the patient.

Contact lenses require a fitting exam by the eye care provider to determine the type of contact lens best suited for the patient. Instructions as to insertion, removal, and care of contact lenses are usually given by ancillary staff. This may be accomplished in either the medical office or the optical dispensary, depending on the structure of the practice.

**SURGICAL VENUES AND TYPES OF SURGERY**

Ophthalmic surgery is an integral part of the ophthalmology practice. Most major ophthalmic surgeries (for example, cataract surgery) are outpatient in nature, though there are instances where the surgery requires inpatient admission to a hospital. Frequently, minor surgical procedures may take place in a surgical suite in the office. A description of the types of surgical suites and facilities follows.

**Office Surgical Suites**

Minor surgical procedures may be performed in the ophthalmic office. Descriptions of these procedures are found in the table that follows. Medical laser surgeries may take place in either the medical office or the surgery facility, depending on practice structure.

- **Outpatient Surgery Centers**

  *Ambulatory Surgery Centers (ASCs).* Ambulatory surgery centers may be a freestanding facility that is totally separate from the physician office or it may be an office-based ASC located adjacent to the ophthalmic practice and generally owned by the practice. All ASCs are licensed and accredited by state agencies. A patient’s length of stay in the ASC is usually brief in nature and never exceeds 23 hours.
Hospital-Based Out Patient Surgery Centers. Hospital-based out patient surgery centers (hospital OPD) provide the same type of surgical services as ASCs but are adjacent to inpatient hospital facilities. Reimbursement for procedures may be calculated at different rates and the patient’s length of stay never exceeds 23 hours.

- **Refractive Laser Centers**

Refractive surgery, which is a laser procedure to correct refractive errors (myopia, hyperopia, and astigmatism), is performed in an office surgical suite, an ASC, or a refractive laser center. A refractive laser center may be owned by the practice or by a different corporate entity. The procedure most commonly performed in a refractive laser center is LASIK (Laser assisted in-situ keratomileusis).

**Minor and Major Surgeries**

Minor procedures are those surgeries that have 10 days or less of post-operative care included in the fee. Major surgeries have 90 days of post-operative care. The following table illustrates several of the most common surgeries and the type of facility in which they are commonly performed.

**Common Ophthalmic Surgical Procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Facility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minor Surgeries: 10 days or less post-op care</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalazion</td>
<td>Surgical incision and drainage of a chalazion (a swelling of the eyelid caused by inflammation of an oil gland on the eyelids).</td>
<td>Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biopsy</td>
<td>Removal of growth on the eye or eyelid, which is sent to a lab to determine the type of growth.</td>
<td>Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Body Removal</td>
<td>Removal of a foreign body that is located in either the conjunctiva or the cornea.</td>
<td>Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctal Plug Insertion</td>
<td>Insertion of punctal plugs into the puncta (tear ducts) to increase comfort of patients with Dry Eye Syndrome.</td>
<td>Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argon Trabeculoplasty</td>
<td>Treatment for glaucoma; an argon laser is used to modify the structure of the trabecular meshwork to increase aqueous outflow in the eye.</td>
<td>Office/ASC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Surgeries: 90-day post-operative care</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cataract</td>
<td>Removal of cloudy lens and the implantation of an intraocular lens (most commonly performed ocular surgery).</td>
<td>ASC/Hospital OPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaucoma Surgery</td>
<td>Performed to increase drainage of fluids within the eye.</td>
<td>ASC/Hospital OPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retinal Detachment</td>
<td>Surgical repair of retinal detachment (may be by scleral buckle or gas pneumopexy).</td>
<td>ASC/Hospital OPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corneal Transplants</td>
<td>Removal of diseased or injured cornea and the replacement with donor tissue.</td>
<td>ASC/Hospital OPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LASIK</td>
<td>LASIK = “Laser assisted in-situ keratomileusis.” Refractive laser procedure to correct myopia, hyperopia, and astigmatism.</td>
<td>Refractive Laser Center/ASC/Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Lasers (YAG, Argon, SLK)</td>
<td>Used to treat different ocular diseases, including treatment of glaucoma, retinal problems (macular degeneration, macular holes), and secondary membranes.</td>
<td>Office/ASC/Hospital OPD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONCLUSION**

An ophthalmic practice has the opportunity to have three licensed professionals providing care to patients. These practices also have the options to provide a full scope of eye care services, including offices, office surgical suites, optical dispensaries, ASCs, and refractive surgery centers. This flexibility allows the practice to focus on patient needs and to provide excellence in patient care.
COURSE EXAMINATION

1. An eye care provider licensed to diagnose and treat diseases of the eye and to perform eye surgery is an:
   a. Optometrist
   b. Optician
   c. Ophthalmologist
   d. Oculars

2. An eye care provider licensed to diagnose and treat diseases of the eye, but unable to perform invasive eye surgery is an:
   a. Optometrist
   b. Optician
   c. Ophthalmologist
   d. Oculars

3. An eye care professional licensed to fabricate and dispense eye glasses is an:
   a. Optometrist
   b. Optician
   c. Ophthalmologist
   d. Oculars

4. Major surgeries are most commonly performed in:
   a. The medical office.
   b. A certified surgical facility.
   c. The corner computer store.
   d. A university classroom.

5. Devices prescribed to correct refractive errors are:
   a. Glasses and Contact Lenses
   b. Crutches
   c. Prosthetics
   d. Medications

6. The most commonly performed eye surgery is:
   a. Corneal Transplant
   b. Cataract Surgery
   c. Glaucoma Surgery
   d. Retinal Surgery

7. Minor surgical procedures have a 90-day post-operative period and are most commonly performed in ambulatory surgery centers.
   a. True
   b. False

8. Which of the following procedures is a common treatment for dry eyes?
   a. YAG Laser
   b. LASIK
   c. Punctual Occlusion
   d. Biopsy
Scope of the Eye Care Practice

9. Instructions as to insertion, removal, and care of contact lenses are usually given by _____________ staff.
   a. Medical
   b. Administrative
   c. Ancillary
   d. Hospital

10. Office surgical suites, outpatient surgery centers, and hospital–based outpatient surgery centers are all types of surgical suites and facilities.
   a. True
   b. False