

Highlights

2002 AOA Scope of Practice Survey¹

Drug Prescribing

Legend Drug and Controlled Substance Authority. More than nine out of ten (98.1 percent) of the optometrists participating in the 2002 Scope of Practice Survey were authorized to prescribe and use legend drugs in the treatment and/or management of eye conditions and diseases. In 1997, only four out of five (81.1 percent) prescribed or used drugs for therapeutic purposes in their practices. In 2002, 53.2 percent of survey respondents had Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) registration numbers allowing them to prescribe certain controlled substances.

Prescriptions Written. Optometrists were asked to report how many prescriptions, by drug category, they had written (or ordered) in the month following receipt of the survey. Not surprisingly, the most widely prescribed medications were those utilized in connection with the clinical care most commonly provided in optometric offices. Table 1 shows the average number of prescriptions written by all responding ODs and (as a benchmark of those taking a more active role in the use of therapeutic agents) the prescribing activity of those optometrists at the 95th percentile (i.e., the doctors in the top 5 percent of prescribing frequency).

1. OD Written/Ordered Drug Rxs During Current Month, Mean Number

Therapeutic Category	All Respondents	ODs at 95 th percentile
Anti-microbial drugs	11.3	25.0
Oral antibiotics	1.1	3.0
Topical anti-inflam/steroid agents	9.8	22.0
Oral anti-inflam/steroid agents	0.6	1.0
Agents to treat glaucoma	10.3	29.0
Anti-viral agents	0.5	2.0
Anti-allergy agents	11.3	25.0
Analgesics	1.4	3.0
Medications for dry eye	23.7	50.0
Vitamin Therapy	8.8	22.0
Punctal plugs	2.0	5.0

Industry “Detailing” Contacts. Optometrists were asked to estimate how many times pharmaceutical company representatives (“detailers”) had contacted them in the office during the last six months. On average, survey respondents reported 2.2 such contacts. The median number of “detailing” contacts was about the same (2.0).

¹ A sample consisting of 4,000 AOA members was sent this survey in September 2002. The response rate was 13.0 percent. Of the respondents to the survey, 80 percent were male and 20 percent were female. Nine of ten ODs identified themselves as part of a private practice setting.

Treatment of Glaucoma & Other Anterior Segment Disorders

Number of Patients Diagnosed. Optometrists are very active in the provision of medical eye care for their patients. During 2002, optometrists diagnosed, on average, 28 patients with glaucoma and 156 with other anterior segment disorders. Optometrists who have appropriate prescribing authority treated or co-managed 72.9 percent of the patients they diagnosed with glaucoma and 82.0 percent of the patients they diagnosed with anterior segment disorders.

2. Optometrist Diagnosed Patients with Glaucoma & Anterior Segment Disorders, 2002

Diagnosis	Mean Number	Number for ODs at the 90 th Percentile
Glaucoma	28.1	58.0
Anterior Segment Disorders	156.2	440.0

Refractive Surgery

Patients Seen and Co-Managed. Optometrists reported that, on average, they conducted an initial discussion or screening with about 50 patients during the last six months. About one-fourth of these patients proceeded to have a pre-operative evaluation in the optometrist's office and about the same number were provided post-operative care by the optometrist.

3. Refractive Surgery Patients Seen by Average OD During the Last 6 Months

Refractive Surgery Patients Seen During Last 6 Months	Mean Number	Median Number
Number	50.1	24.0
Pre-Op Evaluation	12.0	5.0
Post-Op Care Provided	12.4	5.0

Nearly half of ODs reported that co-managed patients were first seen in their offices on the first day after surgery; nearly the same percentage of surveyed optometrists saw co-managed patients between 2-7 days after surgery.

4. Time After Surgery Co-Managed Patients First Seen by ODs

Time Interval	Percent ODs Reporting
One day	49.5
2-7 days	40.2
8-21 days	7.7
22 or more days	2.6

Services. About 28.0 percent of optometrists reported that they do topography (used to map the corneal surface) in their offices. Some 13.3 percent also do pachymetry (used to measure corneal thickness) in the office. Of all refractive surgical patients, optometrists, on average, prescribed or provided spectacle lenses for 23.1 percent of their patients; contact lenses for 4.2 percent of patients; non-prescription sunglasses for 22.7 percent of all refractive surgical patients; and/or medical treatment related to the surgery for about 17.9 percent of their refractive surgical patients.

**5. OD Services Prescribed/Provided
To Refractive Surgical Patients, 2002**

Services	Mean % Patients For Whom Services Prescribed/Provided	Median % Patients For Whom Services Prescribed/Provided
Spectacles	23.1	15.0
Contact lenses	4.2	1.0
Non-Rx sunglasses	22.7	10.0
Medical treatment related to surgery	17.9	5.0

Refractive Surgery Referrals. On average, optometrists reported that they currently had referral relationships with 1.6 refractive surgery centers. They further reported that they currently had referral relationships with an average of 2.0 refractive surgeons. Half the ODs (the median) had referral relationships with at least 2.0 refractive surgery centers and with at least 2.0 refractive surgeons. Optometrists estimated that, on average, 84.6 percent of the patients they referred for refractive surgery returned to them for routine care. ODs market refractive surgical services both within their offices and externally. Of those who did such marketing in 2002, 76.1 percent did so only within the office (internally). About a third 31.3 percent of all respondents also marketed their services outside of the office (externally).

Care for the Diabetic Patient

Services Provided. About 97.5 percent of responding optometrists routinely performed annual dilated fundoscopic examinations on their diabetic patients in their offices. More than half of the respondents (53.0 percent) also reported that they performed fundus photography in their offices. Some 71.1 percent routinely send written reports to the primary care practitioners, internists and/or endocrinologists regarding the ocular health status of their diabetic patients.

Visual Impairment

Visually Impaired Patients. About half (47.1 percent) of the optometrists responding to the 2002 Scope of Practice Survey provide some low vision services to patients. Four out of five ODs (83.8 percent) refer low vision patients elsewhere for services, while 32.1 percent accept low vision referrals from other practitioners.

Community Service Involvement

Community Eye Care Services. About 12.6 percent of ODs responding to the survey have hospital privileges, while 13.7 percent perform eye care services in a hospital setting. About one-third of responding ODs (33.1) performed out-of-office school vision screenings and 24.8 percent also performed community-based geriatric vision screenings. Some 46.3 percent participated in safety eye care/eyewear programs for local businesses, while 12.0 percent provided on-site ocular safety evaluation and/or consultation services for local industry.

Other Community Services. Most respondents (84.8 percent) reported that they donate some of their time and talent to local charitable organizations. Nearly half (45.7 percent) were members of the boards of not-for-profit organizations, 5.2 percent sat on boards of education and 51.8 percent were members of the local Chamber of Commerce.

Patient Age Profile

Distribution of Patient Base. Optometrists participating in the 2002 Scope of Practice Survey were asked report the distribution of their patients seen during one month on an age-related basis. Most patients in the “typical” OD practice were in the age cohort, 41-64. The fewest number of patients, on average, were in the age cohort 0-5.

6. “Typical” Monthly OD Patient Age Profile, 2002

Age Cohort	Percent Patients
Age 0-5	2.6
Age 6-10	7.8
Age 11-20	14.2
Age 21-40	22.1
Age 41-64	31.4
Age 65+	21.9
All ages	100.0

Practice Characteristics

Type of Practice. Most optometrists (84.1 percent) described themselves as self-employed, while about one in six (15.9 percent) reported themselves in the employ of someone else. Approximately three out of five (59.8 percent) of the responding ODs were in solo practice or in two-member partnerships or groups.

6. Primary Practice Type, 2002

Self-Employed	Percent
Solo	42.8
Partnership or group (2-person)	17.0
Partnership or group (3-5 persons)	11.8
Partnership or group (6 or more)	3.9
Optical chain franchisee/leasee	4.7
Independent contractor	3.7
Other self-employed	0.2
All self-employed	84.1

Employed by	Percent
Optometrist(s)	4.7
Ophthalmologist(s)	6.2
HMO	0.8
Hosp/clinic/other multidisciplinary	1.7
Optical chain	0.8
Other employed	1.7
All employed by others	15.9

Years in Practice. Half of all reporting ODs (the median number) were in practice 18 years or more during 2002.

7. Years in Practice

Years in Practice	Percent ODs
5 years or less	4.1
6 to 10 years	19.5
11 to 15 years	16.8
16 to 20 years	19.0
21 to 25 years	19.7
26 to 30 years	10.2
31 to 35 years	6.4
36 to 40 years	3.1
41 or more years	1.2