



Eye Health Center of Troy

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Medicine Resident Teaching Series: Optometrist vs Ophthalmologist vs Optician

Ophthalmologist

These are MDs who have the broadest scope of practice. They see patients that are mostly referred to them from the community primary care physicians, other ophthalmologists or optometrists. They are certified to deliver medical and surgical management of eye conditions.

Optometrist

These are ODs who have attended two years of college followed by 4 years of School of Optometry. Scope of practice involves eye examinations, prescribing glasses and contact lenses and depending on the state regulations and certification requirements, medical treatment of eye conditions. They do not perform surgical interventions.

Optician

These dispense glasses. No college education is required but they need certification for ophthalmic dispensing.

As a general rule, most people who are healthy and between 10 to 50 years of age and most likely have refractive error and no other suspicion of vision threatening acute or chronic eye conditions, should be referred to a local optometrist. For others needing more in depth evaluation, a referral to an ophthalmologist has the most likely chance of minimizing patient visits for a particular eye problem.