



Board of Examiners in Optometry
State of Oklahoma
Office of the Executive Director

November 30, 2022

The Honorable Shereef Elnahal, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW, Room 800
Washington, DC 20420

To whom it may concern,

In 1988 laser training was provided to optometrists at a joint meeting with ophthalmologists. Language in the Optometric Scope of Practice was interpreted to allow the Oklahoma Board of Examiners in Optometry to certify those who had received this laser training to perform laser surgery procedures. Between 1988 and 1998 the Board required the reporting of post-laser procedure outcomes and there were approximately 5,000 laser procedures performed with no negative outcomes.

Legislation, which took effect November 1, 1998, authorized the statutory definition of optometry to include laser surgery procedures. Since 1998 there have been an additional estimated 50,000 laser surgery procedures in which there were no complaints registered. The Board has been informed there were only two (2) insurance settlements made involving PRK. In those two cases a confidentiality agreement was in place. In total, Optometrists in Oklahoma have been providing laser surgery procedures for 32 years.

Additionally, laser eye care is provided by optometrists in a majority of the 77 counties in the State of Oklahoma. The accessibility of this care provides an economical benefit to the citizens of the state since travel expenses are greatly reduced. Oklahoma optometrists may also work together in the same offices as ophthalmologists. These optometrists provide care at the level of their laser certification. Insurance providers authorize payments for laser procedures for Oklahoma licensed optometrists which includes senior citizens covered by Medicare.

Today laser training is provided to students of optometry in all Colleges of Optometry, most of which are state supported. The Oklahoma Board of Optometry certifies all optometrists upon successful passing of Oklahoma State Board Exams. The laser exams are conducted at the time of the annual Board Exams. The National Board of Examiners (NBEO) provides laser testing on the laser education being taught in optometry schools for state Boards of Optometry.

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Optometrists practicing in Veteran hospitals through the nation routinely provide laser procedures to our veterans if the optometrist's scope of practice by licensure will allow. Therefore, many optometrists practicing in VA hospitals will have an Oklahoma optometry license or license from another state that has an equivalent scope of practice.

The Board of Examiners in Oklahoma no longer requires ophthalmic laser treatment reporting since this is a routine procedure in optometric offices in our state.

Oklahoma optometrist's malpractice insurance rate is listed as one of the lowest in the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Russell Laverty, OD". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Russell Laverty, OD, Executive Director
Oklahoma Board of Examiners in Optometry