

Trabeculectomy Surgery Comparison in Oklahoma: Highlighting Inaccuracies and Flawed Data

(Original study was presented March 3, 2016-March 6, 2016 at the American Glaucoma Society Annual Meeting)

Original Study Stated Purpose:

“Oklahoma is one of the few states where optometrists have surgical privileges to perform laser procedures on the eye. Optometrists in other US states are actively lobbying to obtain permission to obtain privileges to perform these procedures. The purpose of this study is to compare Medicare claims data regarding laser trabeculectomy (LTP) surgeries performed by ophthalmologists to those performed by optometrists to determine whether differences exist among procedures performed by the two provider groups.”

Inaccuracies and Flawed Data:

- **The study was undertaken in an attempt to justify and perpetuate a national anticompetitive monopoly by ophthalmologists, who perform more than 99 percent of these procedures in the United States.** The authors acknowledge the purpose of the study arises because optometrists are seeking to compete with ophthalmologists to provide this service. The authors conclude self-servingly that policymakers should refrain from allowing optometrists to compete with ophthalmologists.
- **According to a media report of a presentation by one of the study authors, they did not prove there is any difference in quality of care provided by optometrists and ophthalmologists.** The study focused on follow-up visits billed by the eye surgeons, but does not determine whether the rate of follow-up care reflects higher or lower quality, nor does it compare the functional outcome or patient satisfaction with the care. The study also fails to account for other procedures that ophthalmologists might have done in place of a repeat trabeculectomy.
- **The sample size of the survey is too small for a valid comparison.** During a period of 6 years, the study found the procedure was provided 274 times in Medicare by optometrists, an average of 45 per year. According to AOA’s research, only 5 optometrists in Oklahoma performed this procedure as many as 10 times in a year for Medicare patients. The study is invalid because it fails to compare optometrists with ophthalmologists who have performed the service at a similar rate, and after a comparable amount of time in practice.
- **The study failed to account for difference in patients.** Valid medical studies adjust the results based on patient populations. Patients can present with widely varying health and medical histories, as well as different demographics. The study does not account whatsoever for such patient or systemic variations.

- The study focuses on “sessions” without acknowledging that ophthalmologists successfully changed the description of the service to no longer mention “sessions.”** The change in coding descriptor was approved by the AMA after the study period. The study might be biased by different coding practices of ophthalmologists and optometrists. In any event, analysis using the old code descriptor no longer has much relevance.
- The study author who presented the paper is biased.** Dr. Joshua D. Stein disclosed that he receives funding support from the American Academy of Ophthalmology, an advocacy organization that seeks to limit competition for ophthalmologists. With such inherent and inescapable bias, the authors were predisposed to the study’s conclusion regardless of the evidence.

By the Numbers:

- As noted in the table below, these were the only doctors of optometry across the country who were paid for the code 65855 at least 10 times in 2013 in Medicare. It’s important to note that Dr. Williams of Oklahoma is the only optometrists who provided more than 2 procedures per patient.

Table: Optometrists Reimbursed in 2013 for 65855

NPI	Last Name	First Name	State	Provider Type	# of Services	# of Beneficiaries	Services/Bene
1831173988	PEPLINSKI	LEE	KY	Opt	62	49	1.27
1902802895	WILLIAMS	BRIAN	OK	Opt	62	19	3.26
1932102894	HENRY	LARRY	OK	Opt	14	11	1.27
1952304586	SOLORZANO	JORGE	OK	Opt	25	16	1.56
1962405928	ELLEN	JASON	OK	Opt	61	39	1.56
1992729909	MASSENGALE	CURT	OK	Opt	25	14	1.79

- In comparison to the optometrists above, below are the numbers of all doctors across the country who billed 65885 for at least 10 Medicare patients and more than 3 services per beneficiary.
- Along with Dr. Williams, there are 13 ophthalmologists who report to have continued treatments for the same patient. Along with Dr. Weir in Oklahoma who authored this study, repeat rates are substantially higher than Dr. Williams among the ophthalmologists.

Table: Physicians Reimbursed for 65855 in 2013 with a Services/Beneficiary ratio of 3±

NPI	Last Name	First	Provider Type	# of Services	# of Beneficiaries	Services/Bene
1295799849	CROLEY	JAMES	OPHTH	50	15	3.33
1407916927	CAPLAN	DANIEL	OPHTH	54	15	3.60
1508924580	FARGNOLI	DONALD	OPHTH	150	50	3.00
1548207426	FERREIRA	CLAUDIO	OPHTH	47	12	3.92
1548283930	ORIZU	IFEANYI	OPHTH	420	128	3.28
1578513024	GINSBERG	BARRETT	OPHTH	43	12	3.58
1710956925	KRASINSKY	WALTER	OPHTH	49	15	3.27
1730181561	SHAFFER	SHAUN	OPHTH	50	15	3.33
1801968011	PELTAN	HAROLD	OPHTH	440	117	3.76
1821273137	BAHRI	SEAN	OPHTH	303	92	3.29
1831294651	THORBURN	DAVID	OPHTH	492	137	3.59
1841200037	WEIR	KURT	OPHTH	71	19	3.74
1851386395	NEWSOM	THOMAS	OPHTH	51	17	3.00
1902802895	WILLIAMS	BRIAN	Opt	62	19	3.26

Conclusion:

- **This is a biased study with reported data and information, skewed to support an agenda of suppression of increased optometric medical care.**