OPTOMETRIC STAFF IN OPTOMETRY PRACTICES

In 2016, the most commonly employed optometric staff positions among all optometry practices were clinical and secretary/receptionist positions. As seen in Figure 1, more than 70% of practices reported employing staff in these positions. Dedicated optical dispensing positions were the third most frequently reported position with 61% of practices employing optical dispensing staff. Ninety-one percent of practices reported employment of non-optometrist staff either on a full-time or part-time basis, 86% of practices employed full-time optometric staff and 53% employed part-time optometric staff.

Optometrists reported an average of 4.8 staff per optometrist in 2016, nearly triple the 1.7 staff per optometrist reported in 2013. Optometrists who were members of the AOA reported 4.8 staff per optometrist compared to non-AOA member optometrists who reported 4.9 staff per optometrist.

Figure 1: Percentage of Optometry Practices Employing Optometric Staff by Position 2012-2016

About the 2017 Survey of Optometric Practice:

The 2017 Survey of Optometric Practice was conducted by the American Optometric Association (AOA) Research & Information Center between April and July 2018. Results from the survey are being released in three volumes: 1) Income from Optometry; 2) Employment of Optometric Staff, and 3) Practicing Optometrists and Their Patients.

The 2017 Employment of Optometric Staff Detailed Analysis Report is derived from the 2017 Survey of Optometric Practice, the intent of which is to gather key information about optometric practice characteristics such as the number and frequency of patient visits, hours worked and average income of optometrists and their staff. This report focuses on the employment of non-optometrist staff in the optometry practice. Optometric staff positions analyzed include clinical staff, optical dispensing, optical laboratory, coding & billing personnel, secretary/ receptionists, office managers and financial coordinators. Results are presented for all owners, solo owners and non-solo owners. This executive summary aims to provide a high-level overview of information contained in the detailed report.

Several limitations of this study should be noted: 1) optometrists were invited to complete a paper survey which was distributed by the U.S. Postal Service. Incorrect addresses or delays in delivering the survey instrument may have excluded doctors from participating in, or receiving, the survey instrument. 2) Optometrists who chose to participate in this survey were self-selected, which may mean that the survey attracted responses from optometrists whose practices were doing exceptionally well or exceptionally poor.
Optometric staff employed in clinical positions include non-optometrists who perform clinical duties such as obtaining patient histories, pretesting patients, measuring visual acuity, and glaucoma screening.

Optometric staff employed in optical dispensing positions play an essential part in ensuring that the optometrist’s recommendations and specifications are met and that frames and lenses best suit the prescription and lifestyle needs of the patient. The optical dispensing staff may explain the many lens and coating options available for improving visual comfort and/or adding protection and ensure that glasses are made in a way that makes them look the very best they can on the patient.

Optometric staff employed in optical laboratory positions may perform duties such as frame repairs, lens finishing, surfacing and coating.