OPTOMETRIC STAFF IN OPTOMETRY PRACTICES

In 2013, the most commonly employed optometric staff positions among all practices were clinical staff, followed by optical dispensing staff. Forty-nine percent of responding optometry practices employed optometric staff for clinical positions; 48% employed optical dispensing staff. Dedicated secretary/receptionist positions were the third most frequently reported staff position in optometry practices for the fourth consecutive year, with 47% of practices employing secretary/receptionists in 2013. Financial coordinator positions were the least employed staff positions in private and corporate practices, and optical laboratory positions were the least employed staff positions in other practice types. Two out of three (66%) optometry practices reported employment of non-optometrist staff in 2013 on a full-time or part-time basis. Among all practices, 61% employed optometric staff on a full-time basis, and 40% employed part-time staff.

The number of optometric staff per optometrist is similar for all practices (1.7 staff) and for only those practices that employed optometric staff in 2013 (2.5 staff). Private practices reported an average of 2.6 staff per optometrist; corporate practices reported 2.4 staff per optometrist. Optometrists who were members of the AOA reported employing, on average, 1.8 staff per optometrist, while non-members employed 1.6 staff per optometrist.

Figure 1: Percentage of Optometry Practices Employing Optometric Staff by Position, 2013
U.S. CENSUS REGION & CPC CERTIFICATION

Optometry practices located in the Midwestern and Western regions of the United States employed the most optometric staff in 2013 with an average of 1.8 staff per optometrist each. Practices located in the Northeastern region employed the fewest staff, averaging 1.4 per optometrist.

Optometrists in the Midwest reported the highest percentage of AOA paraoptometric section members among their staff at 38%. The West reported the highest percentage of paraoptometrics certified by the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) (14%) in 2013.

One-quarter (25%) of optometrists surveyed believe that CPC certified optometric staff improves patient care. Twenty-three percent of optometrists also believe that CPC certified staff improve patient education.

CLINICAL STAFF

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. The average number of clinical staff employed in all practices in 2013 was 0.9 staff per optometrist. The average hourly salary of clinical staff in all practices was $16.68, an 8.7% increase from $15.34 in 2012. Thirty-eight percent of all clinical staff were members of the AOA paraoptometric section, up from 14% in 2012. Fourteen percent of clinical staff were certified by the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) in 2013, up from 5% in 2012.

OPTICAL LABORATORY STAFF

Optical laboratory staff may perform duties such as frame repairs, lens finishing, surfacing and coating. Optical laboratory positions were the second least employed staff position in optometry practices during 2013; practices that did employ optical laboratory staff were more likely to employ them on a full-time basis as opposed to part-time. The average number of optical laboratory personnel among all practices was 0.2 per optometrist. The average hourly wages were $17.33. Among all reported optical laboratory staff in 2013, 35% were members of the AOA paraoptometric section, up from 10% in 2012. Twenty-four percent of optical laboratory staff were certified by the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) in 2013, up from 2% in 2012.

OPTICAL DISPENSING STAFF

Optometric staff employed in optical dispensing positions play an essential part in ensuring that the optometrist’s recommendations and specifications are met by explaining the many lens and coating options available for improving visual comfort and/or adding protection and helping patients make the best choices in frames and lenses for their prescriptions, lifestyles and overall needs. Optical dispensing staff were the second most commonly reported staff position in optometry practices in 2013 and more commonly employed on a full-time basis as opposed to part-time employment.

The average number of optical dispensing staff in all practices was 0.7 staff per optometrist. The average hourly salary in 2013 was $20.63. Optometrists responding to the 2014 Survey reported 36% of optical dispensing staff were members of the AOA paraoptometric section, up from 15% in 2012. Eighteen percent of optical dispensing staff were certified by the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) in 2013, up from 7% in 2012.
OFFICE STAFF POSITIONS: CODING & BILLING, SECRETARY/RECEPTIONIST, OFFICE MANAGER & FINANCIAL COORDINATOR

The average number of coding & billing staff per optometrist decreased to 0.3 staff per optometrist in 2013, down from 0.5 in 2012. The average hourly salary among all practices was $17.45.

For secretary/receptionist positions, the average number of staff was 0.5 per optometrist. The average hourly wages of secretary/receptionist staff among all practices in 2013 was $15.72.

The average number of office managers in 2013 was 0.3 per optometrist. Office managers in all practices earned an average of $20.70 per hour.

Financial coordinators remained the least employed staff position. The average number of financial coordinators was 0.1 per optometrist. Financial coordinators in all practices earned an average of $20.38 per hour.

About the 2014 Survey of Optometric Practice:

The 2014 Survey of Optometric Practice was conducted by the American Optometric Association (AOA) Research and Information Center in July 2014. 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 Employment of Optometric Staff Detailed Analysis Report focuses on employment of non-optometrist staff in optometry practices and uses limited narrative with cross tabulation for further analysis. This report may be purchased by contacting the AOA Marketplace by phone (888-262-2210) or online at: www.aoa.org/marketplace.

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. (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.

For questions about this survey, or other surveys conducted by the AOA, please contact the Research & Information Center at: RIC@aoa.org.