# In-Office Services and Dispensing by Physicians Enhances Patient-Centered Care

Many physicians and other health care practitioners provide treatments, procedures, devices, medications, supplements and so on, to patients to address health challenges and support overall well-being. Such dispensing improves patient compliance, convenience and insures a higher level of continued care. The provision of certain products and procedures in-office is truly "patient-centered" care. It assures delivery of the right care, at the right time, and in the right place.

The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) has issued a challenge to reduce eye injuries, vision threatening disease and correctable vision impairment among Americans.[i] The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) likewise has prioritized the awareness of vision and eye health and improved access to eye and vision care.[ii]

Doctors of optometry provide timely access to treatment at the point of care to help address this public health need. Medical products used in first aid and emergency procedures, prescription eyeglasses, safety eyewear and contact lenses are essential tools in meeting that responsibility to the public.

Accordingly, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has consistently supported the public health dispensing of contact lenses as medical devices by doctors of optometry with a valid dated contact lens prescription.[iii] The FDA warns the public that contact lenses are a medical device requiring a prescription and recommends the purchase of contact lenses from a trustworthy company or practitioner who sells FDA-cleared or approved contact lenses. The FDA recognizes doctors of optometry as a trustworthy source for obtaining contact lenses.[iv]

Physicians including doctors of optometry often dispense medical devices such as glucometers (blood glucose measuring medical devices) to their diabetes patients in office. This extends quality care to the patient beyond the doctor's office and reinforces the need for daily self-monitoring of blood glucose (SMBG) to promote good glycemic control, reducing complications associated with diabetes, including blindness. Dispensing this technology in optometry offices has been shown to improve diabetes care by as much as 100 percent, as measured by patient survey, among sub-optimally controlled patients with diabetes. Patient-centered care was confirmed by the fact that 54 percent of the study participants reported they were "extremely positive" or "very positive" about the impact of the doctor of optometry dispensing and training them on the new medical device and its effect on their diabetes health.[v] Studies have shown that daily SMBG can reduce A1C, which in turn will reduce complications, including, but not limited to, retinopathy by 37 percent.[vi]

Doctors of optometry also dispense wearable technology to make it easier for those with progressive eye diseases to see and have a higher quality of daily life. Medical devices, such as IrisVision, NuEyes, and eSight, are worn as glasses or worn over glasses for individuals with macular degeneration.[vii] A variety of medical devices for different eye conditions and diseases, such as stand and hand-held magnifiers, strong

magnifying reading glasses, loupes and small telescopes are also dispensed at point of care because they, along with most low vision medical devices, require patient fitting and training by the doctor and his/her staff.

Doctors of optometry also dispense implantable technologies. Medical device occlusion therapy products provide effective diagnosis and treatment of dry eye disease and are inserted into the lacrimal puncta by a doctor of optometry at point of care.

The American Medical Association recognizes in its code of ethics that physicians may prescribe and dispense drugs and devices under certain circumstances, such as dispensing that primarily benefits the patient.[viii] Similarly, the American Optometric Association has standards of professional conduct that confirm that the care of a patient should never be influenced by the self-interests of the provider. [ix]

Along with other physicians, doctors of optometry may choose to dispense prescribed medication at point of care. This form of physician dispensing improves patient compliance by allowing a practice to buy commonly prescribed medications in pre-labeled, ready-to-dispense containers and sell them directly to patients at a significant discount. [x] Adding a point-of-care dispensary or pharmacy, practices can give patients the full range of treatment options at one site from a team of health professionals they know and trust.[xi] This service is known as "the right patient, the right drug, the right time, the right dose and the right route"—all of which are generally regarded as a standard for safe medication practices.[xii]

Medicare, Medicaid, and other health care payers not only allow physicians to provide the treatments they recommend, they establish patient-centered rules specifically to guide the process for medical devices and equipment. These rules are mostly aimed at institutional sellers who do not otherwise provide the same level of care as a doctor supplying items to a patient. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) allows any willing physician–and thousands do--to prescribe and supply durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies (DMEPOS) for patients, as long as the physician writes the prescription following a face-to-face examination of the patient. CMS also requires the DMEPOS suppliers to meet a set of standards, including the requirement that a licensed, certified or registered practitioner acting within their scope of practice to personally fit the item for the patient, and provide necessary information and instructions concerning its use. Physicians are available after hours, have a response plan for emergencies, and obtain continuing education consistent with the specialized equipment, items, and services they provide to patients. DMEPOS suppliers also record adverse events due to malfunctioning equipment and/or item(s) (e.g., injuries, accidents, signs and symptoms of infection, hospitalizations). These patient protections,[xiii] which retail and Internet sellers of contact lenses do not necessarily follow, help ensure patient-centered care.

Prescribed products dispensed by physicians to patients include, but are not limited to, crutches, walkers, custom fabricated and custom fitted orthoses, prosthetic devices (including eyeglasses, contact lenses and prosthetic/artificial eyes), external breast prostheses, therapeutic shoes and inserts, custom-made somatic, ocular and facial prostheses, respiratory equipment, manual wheelchairs, power mobility devices, and complex rehabilitative wheelchairs and assistive technology, and devices to deliver ultraviolet light, within a narrow spectrum, to the skin, for conditions such as plaque psoriasis.[xiv]

Clearly, the notion that doctors of optometry are the only health care practitioners who deliver medical products or devices to their patients (promulgated primarily by online contact lens retailers) is false. In litigation against 1-800 CONTACTS, Federal Trade Commission attorneys rejected that myth, explaining, "it is common knowledge that health care professionals at ambulatory surgical centers, orthopedic centers, dental service providers and many other health care providers may sell the products they prescribe."[xv]

While eye doctors are not required to provide eyeglasses and contact lenses to patients, physicians and other health care practitioners are to be commended for ethically delivering patient-centered care, when possible. Helping patients obtain treatment while in their doctor's office builds strong doctor-patient relationships and promotes patient-centered care, thus reducing vision impairment in the United States.

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[i] http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2016/making-eye-health-a-population-health-imperative-vision-for-tomorrow.aspx
[ii] https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/resources/infographics/pdfs/VHI-infographic-H.pdf
[iii] https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/contact-lenses/decorative-contact-lenses
[iv] https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/contact-lenses/buying-contact-lenses
[v] Knight, M, Dueñas, M: Optometry's Role in Improving Interprofessional Healthcare in America Highlighted National Academies of Practice (NAP) 2018 Annual Meeting & Forum, April 13-14 in Atlanta, GA.
[vi] https://professional.diabetes.org/meeting/other/overcoming-therapeutic-inertia
[vii] https://lowvisionmd.org/3-medical-devices-that-are-helping-the-legally-blind-to-see/
[viii] https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/ama-code-medical-ethics-opinions-sale-and-dispensing-health-related-products/2010-12
[ix] https://www.aoa.org/documents/about/Standards-of-Professional-Conduct_Adopted-June-2011.pdf
[x] https://www.brppharma.com/physician-dispensing-information
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[xiii] 42 CFR §424.57(c)
[xiv] https://www.medgadget.com/2018/12/lumas-illuvinate-now-available-for-drug-free-plaque-psoriasis-treatment-at-home.html
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