



Original Article

Usefulness of Optometric Services In the Eyecare Profession Ophthalmologists' Perspective.

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Purpose: The objective of the study was to evaluate ophthalmologists' views regarding the usefulness of optometric services in the eye care profession in Pakistan.

Methods: Data was gathered by a self-designed questionnaire. All the data was entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS Version 20.0). A total of 105 ophthalmologists participated in this study.

Results: Eighty one percent of ophthalmologists had the view that optometric services were useful in the eye care profession. Their services included the management of uncooperative patients, retinoscopy, cycloplegic refraction, glaucoma co-management, refraction, and diagnosis of other eye conditions. The majority of participants had a positive opinion about the behavior of optometrists with their patients, their communication, retinoscopy, skills of managing uncooperative patients and cycloplegic skills respectively. Ninety percent ophthalmologists agreed that the role of optometrists was very important in achieving goals of vision 2020. Mixed responses were obtained for their contact lens practices. Most of them were neutral about the diagnostic skills of optometrists. Above 60% of participants replied that optometrists had good glaucoma referrals. According to the ophthalmologists' perspective, there was a need for enhancement in clinical skills. Ninety percent of participants agreed that optometrists were an integral part of an eye care team and they felt difficulty in managing OPD's and patients in the absence of optometrists.

Conclusions:

Ophthalmologists considered different optometric services, very useful for the community and eye care profession. The study showed that optometrists were performing their duties very well. Optometrists provide high-quality services that were greatly accepted and appreciated by patients, health professionals, and the community.

Key Words: optometrists, ophthalmologists, perspective, usefulness, services, Enhanced services scheme (ESS).



Introduction:

The eye care professionals who perform refractive error correction through spectacles or contact lenses, pediatric refraction like cycloplegic refraction, low vision rehabilitation, diagnosis of eye diseases and manage binocular vision anomalies, and much more, are called 'OPTOMETRISTS'.¹ They counsel their patients about the possible options for visual restoration according to their professions, socio-economic conditions, and lifestyles. They suggest surgical or non-surgical options.

Optometric services are a diverse range of services provided by fully trained optometrists.² Professional growth depends upon the use of these services. In past people thought that this was just knowledge or skill. The occupation progressed and now they are universally accepted as certified professional.³ Refractive errors that remain uncorrected mostly cause visual lack and 90% of them are living in developing countries.⁴ Pakistan is also a developing country. Children are the pillars of any society. Among all other causes, refractive errors are the main cause of visual deficiency in Children.⁵ Uncorrected refractive errors are one of the main reasons of decreased vision in adults as well. In children, this condition is managed by vision screening camps. In these camps, optometrists evaluate refractive errors and also provide spectacles.⁶

Taking example of a developed country, the previous era was the era of the growth of enhanced services in the UK. In the consequences of these services now the optometrists refer their patients to their colleague optometrists rather than to the medical practitioner as in the past. Due to these changes, more optometrists are now joining and contributing to enhanced services. This is necessary for the progression of their profession.⁷ Enhanced Service Schemes (ESS) in England includes schemes like cataract referral,⁸ triage of glaucoma referral improvement.⁹

The optometrists are important members of an eye care team that can provide useful and helpful optometric services. As the visual impairment across the world is very high, this prevalence can be diminished with the identification of the role of optometrists. They can diagnose the disease timely and manage it properly. If the disease is at its advanced stage then it must be properly referred without wastage of time. Patients are

managed through proper counseling. Now it's time to comprehend their role in all these tasks.¹⁰

Developed countries have now acknowledged the role of optometrists. In 50 states and regions of Columbia, optometrists are allowed and they have the right to manage glaucoma individually. They can prescribe diagnostic and therapeutic agents, injections and apply therapeutic lasers.¹¹

The collective care can be provided by optometrists and ophthalmologists accepted by patients. Patients have positive opinions about "shared care". This is a way to diminish the wastage of patients' time. There is also a chance to build strong collaboration between these two groups although, belief should be more established.¹²

The usefulness of optometric services is the main key point which we had tried to assess in this study. To which extent services were useful according to ophthalmologists and to what extent optometrists were doing their best? The study included views about optometric services like refraction, contact lens prescription, low vision rehabilitation services, Orthoptic assessment, and clinical investigative procedures.

Material and Methods:

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted on 105 ophthalmologists. The study consisted of both male and female ophthalmologists. Data were gathered by a self-designed questionnaire. All the data were entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS Version 20.0) and later on the opinion of ophthalmologists through 23 questions in the questionnaire was analyzed.

Results:

Total of 105 ophthalmologists participated in this study. Eighty one percent ophthalmologists had the opinion that optometric services are useful in the eye care profession. Services included were, management of uncooperative patients, retinoscopy, cycloplegic refraction, glaucoma co-management, refraction, and diagnosis of other eye conditions. The vast majority of participants had positive opinions about the behavior of optometrists with their patients, their communication, retinoscopy, skills of managing uncooperative patients and cycloplegic skills respectively. Ninety percent of ophthalmologists agreed that the role of optometrists is

Table 1:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Frequency(%)	Frequency(%)	Frequency(%)	Frequency(%)	Frequency(%)
You are well familiar with the behavior practice of optometrists?	-	2(1.9)	6(5.7)	55(52.4)	42(40)
They communicate well with the patients?	-	8(7.6)	11(10.5)	67(63.8)	19(18.1)
Retinoscopy is the best method of objective refraction?	-	4(3.8)	8(7.6)	25(23.8)	68(64.8)
Autorefractometer is the best method of objective refraction?	14(13.3)	29(27.6)	37(35.2)	17(16.2)	8(7)
They have good skills to cope up with uncooperative patients?	-	12(11.4)	25(23.8)	60(57.1)	8(7.6)
They have learned good cycloplegic skills?	-	-	26(24.8)	59(56.2)	20(19)
How will you rate their refractive skills?	-	2(1.9)	11(10.5)	61(58.1)	31(29.5)
Do you find the role of optometrists important in achieving VISION 2020 goals?	-	-	12(11.4)	34(32.4)	59(56.2)
Is their low vision rehabilitation impacting positively on the community?	-	4(3.8)	27(25.7)	40(38.1)	34(32.4)
Are they helpful in the management of amblyopia?	-	7(6.7)	28(26.7)	39(37.1)	31(29.5)
Do you think their low vision services are sufficient for patients?	5(4.8)	23(21.9)	29(27.6)	33(31.4)	15(14.3)
Have they got good skills in co management of glaucoma?	7(6.7)	29(27.6)	40(38.1)	26(24.8)	3(2.9)
Have they got good referral skills?	3(2.9)	24(22.9)	15(14.3)	46(43.8)	17(16.2)
Have they learned enough skills to manage patients of squint?	4(3.8)	22(21)	23(21.9)	41(39)	15(14.3)
Are you satisfied with their contact lens practice?	3(2.9)	24(22.9)	34(32.4)	35(33.3)	9(8.6)
Are you satisfied with their diagnostic skills?	-	1(1.0)	13(12.4)	37(35.2)	54(51.4)
Have they enough capabilities to manage minor eye diseases?	-	-	18(17.1)	35(33.3)	52(49.5)
Do you think optometrists need to enhance their clinical skills?	-	-	6(5.7)	44(41.9)	55(52.4)
Do you think that there is extensive research area for optometrists to work on	-	4(3.8)	16(15.2)	58(52.2)	27(25.7)
2050-70% of cases visiting eye OPDs are of refraction, this makes an optometrist integral part of any eye department?	-	-	6(5.7)	44(41.9)	55(52.4)
Are you satisfied with their overall performance?	-	4(3.8)	16(15.2)	58(55.2)	27(25.7)
How will you rate this statement "Optometrists are an essential part of the eye care team"?	-	2(1.9)	7(6.7)	39(37.1)	57(54.3)
Do you find it difficult to manage OPD in the absence of an optometrist?	7(6.7)	10(9.5)	15(14.3)	41(39)	32(30.5)

very important in achieving goals of vision 2020. Mixed responses were obtained for their contact lens practices. Most of them were neutral about the diagnostic skills of optometrists. Above 60% of participants replied that optometrists had good glaucoma referrals. According to the ophthalmologists' perspective, there was a need for enhancement in clinical skills. Ninety percent of participants agreed that optometrists are an integral part of an eye care team and they felt difficulty in managing OPD's and patients in the absence of optometrists.

Discussion:

In the previous studies, researchers found opinions of ophthalmologists regarding some specific schemes of delivery of eye care. This study tried to encompass all types of services provided by optometrists. Ophthalmologists showed a very positive response and were impressed by optometrists' capabilities and skills of managing patients having different diseases and the standard of care they were providing. Regardless of some minor concerns, the overall response was very good. There were some deficiencies in the provision of low vision services due to the unavailability of low vision devices and fewer numbers of low vision rehabilitation centers.

The researchers explored the role of optometrists in India. There was some missing entity like the role of optometrists in vision 2020. Trust and healthy inter-professional collaboration are mandatory for professional development. Ophthalmologists' views were assessed with the help of 23 questions which were asked in the questionnaire with the option to either agree, disagree or neutral with the given responses and it is evident from the above results that the majority agreed with the responses. The study showed that optometrists and their services were very useful. 90% of ophthalmologists agreed upon the use of these services.¹⁰

There was a lack of literature regarding ophthalmologists' views about the usefulness of optometric services. The sample size in past studies was very small and showed the opinions of a few ophthalmologists. The current study covered views of large no of eye care professionals and encompassed broader perspectives like views regarding counseling, amblyopia management, squint assessment, contact lens fitting and many more.

This study showed that ophthalmologists had views about the enhancement of optometrists' clinical skills and there is an extensive area for optometrists to work on. Similarly, in their opinion optometrists need to enhance their referral skills. There is room for the betterment of services through changing legal framework so that we can touch the horizons of optometry.

Conclusions:

Ophthalmologists considered different optometric services, very useful for the community and eye care profession. The study showed that optometrists were performing their duties very well. Ophthalmologists were reluctant about services in glaucoma co-management and disease diagnosis. Optometrists should involve in the provision of enhanced services to patients like optometrists in the UK who are participating in enhanced services scheme (ESS). Optometrists provide high-quality services that are greatly accepted and appreciated by patients, health professionals, and the community. There is still an extensive area for optometrists to work on.

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