



Orthoptists as Physician Extenders

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Professionals vs. Technicians in Health Care

A physician extender is a health care provider other than a physician, who provides quasi-autonomous care under a physician's supervision.¹⁻² Physician extenders include professional occupations that require a Bachelor Degree at minimum in a specialized field.³ These workers have high levels of responsibility and complex duties, and differ from technicians in educational background, length and complexity of formal training, and professional responsibilities.³ Such responsibilities may include supervision of other workers, education, or conducting research, in addition to providing health care services.

In contrast, technicians perform routine clinical tasks, operate medical equipment, and assist the diagnosing and treating practitioners by gathering test results.³ A minimum of a high school diploma is typically required, though some 1- and 2-year postsecondary programs resulting in a certificate or Associate Degree may be available.³⁻⁴ Formal training is often not required, and many are trained on-the-job.⁴

Orthoptists vs. Ophthalmic Technicians

The American Medical Association recognizes **Orthoptics** as a health care profession involving the evaluation and treatment of disorders of vision, eye movements, and eye alignment in children and adults.⁵ The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) lists **Orthoptists** (profession 29-1199.05) under the category of Health Diagnosing and Treating Practitioners.⁶ This is the same category shared by Nurse Practitioners and Nurse Anesthetists. The ETA divides jobs into zones according to the extent of preparation needed to enter the field, the knowledge, skills, and experience

¹ Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 8th Ed. © 2009, Elsevier.

² McGraw-Hill Concise Dictionary of Modern Medicine. © 2002, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

³ Career Guide to Industries, 2010-11 Ed. Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Dept. of Labor

⁴ Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11, Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Dept. of Labor

⁵ Health Care Careers Directory, 2010-2011, American Medical Association, Chicago, IL; www.ama-assn.org/go/alliedhealth

⁶ <http://online.onetcenter.org/>



necessary, the tasks, work activities, work context, and tools and technology used in the execution of duties. There are five such “Job Zones”. **Orthoptics** is categorized in Zone Five: Extensive Preparation Needed.⁶

Ophthalmic technicians (profession 29-2099.03) fall under the category of Health Technologists and Technicians, Other. Other examples in this category are Nurse Midwives and Hearing Aid Specialists. Ophthalmic technicians are categorized in Zone Three: Medium Preparation Needed.⁶

Education and Credentialing

The American Orthoptic Council (AOC)⁷ establishes the requirements for education in **Orthoptics**, accredits teaching programs able to meet those requirements, examines and certifies candidates who complete training, sets continuing education goals for periodic recertification, and oversees the ethical aspects of orthoptic practice in the United States. The AOC consists of representatives of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, the American Association of Certified Orthoptists, the American Ophthalmological Society, and the Canadian Orthoptic Council.

A baccalaureate degree is required for entrance into an orthoptic program. Orthoptic students must complete a 24-month program of study in an accredited Orthoptic Program, and successfully pass both a written and an oral/practical board examination given by the AOC in order to obtain national certification. The certificate issued by the Council signifies that the **Certified Orthoptist** has successfully completed the training and examination process, has met the standards for certification, and is ethically and otherwise in good standing. Orthoptists must re-certify every three years, showing proof of continuing education that includes attendance at scientific meetings.

Orthoptists are physician extenders who function in a manner similar to the nurse practitioner or physician assistant. **Certified Orthoptists** have the technical expertise necessary to evaluate and diagnose disorders of binocular vision and ocular motility. They are also certified to design and manage a program of non-surgical management of these disorders, under the indirect supervision of an ophthalmologist.

⁷ www.orthoptics.org



Supervision of Orthoptic Services

Medicare recognizes and defines three levels of supervision for physician extenders performing diagnostic tests.^{8,9} These are General, Direct, and Personal. The Sensorimotor Examination (**92060**) and the Orthoptic Training (**92065**) procedures require the lowest level: *General* supervision. This level of supervision *does not require* the physician's presence in the facility during the procedure, though the procedure is performed under the overall direction and control of the physician. In addition, the supervising physician does not need to be the physician who ordered the diagnostic test or service.ⁱ

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ⁱ This Document was approved by the American Orthoptic Council on March 31, 2011.

⁸ Medicare's Carrier Manual, Section 2050.

⁹ ASBELL RL: Proper Coding for Diagnostic Tests. *Ophthalmol Options*; Oct 2007.