

National Highlights

**2001 AOA
Scope of Practice Survey¹**

National Highlights

2001 AOA Scope of Practice Survey²

Drug Prescribing

1. **Legend Drug and Controlled Substance Authority.** More than nine out of ten (96.7 percent) of the optometrists participating in the 2001 Scope of Practice Survey were authorized to prescribe and use legend drugs in the treatment and/or management of eye conditions and diseases. In 1997, four out of five ODs (81.1 percent) prescribed or used drugs for therapeutic purposes in their practices. In addition, 45.2 percent of the optometrists participating in the Survey had Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) registration numbers permitting them to prescribe certain controlled substances.

2. **Prescriptions Written.** Optometrists were asked to report how many prescriptions, by drug category, they had either written (or ordered) during the last month prior to completing the survey. Not surprisingly, the most widely prescribed medications were those utilized in connection with the clinical care most commonly provided in optometric offices. Table 1 shows the average number of prescriptions written by all responding ODs and (as a benchmark of those taking a more active role in the use of therapeutic agents) the prescribing activity of those optometrists at the 95th percentile (i.e., the doctors in the top 5 percent of prescribing frequency).

1. Number of OD Written/Ordered Drug Rxs During the Last Month

Therapeutic Category	Mean	ODs at 95th Percentile
Anti-microbial drugs	17.1	50.0
Anti-inflammatory drugs	11.7	38.0
Drugs for treatment of glaucoma	14.7	47.0
Anti-allergy drugs	10.9	30.0
Medications for dry eye	25.7	80.0

3. **Industry “Detailing” Contacts.** Optometrists were asked to estimate how often pharmaceutical company representatives (“detailers”) had made contact with them in the office during the last six month period. On average, survey respondents reported 2.8 such contacts. The median number of “detailing” contacts was 2.0.

²A sample consisting of 4,000 AOA members was sent this survey in January 2001. The response rate was 42 percent. Of the respondents to the survey, 91.6 percent were male and 8.4 percent were female. Nine of ten ODs identified themselves as part of a private practice setting.

Treatment of Glaucoma & Other Anterior Segment Disorders

4. **Number of Patients Diagnosed.** Optometrists are very active in the provision of medical eye care for their patients. During 2000, optometrists diagnosed, on average, 28 patients with glaucoma and 165 with other anterior segment disorders. Optometrists who have appropriate prescribing authority treated or co-managed 78.4 percent of the patients they diagnosed with glaucoma and 83.9 percent of the patients they diagnosed with anterior segment disorders. Half of the respondents (the median number) treated or co-managed virtually all (98-100 percent) of the patients they diagnosed with glaucoma or they diagnosed with anterior segment disorders.

2. Optometrist Diagnosed Patients with Glaucoma & Anterior Segment Disorders, 2000

Diagnosis	Mean Number	Number for ODs at the 90th Percentile
Glaucoma	28.4	52.0
Anterior segment disorders	164.7	450.0

Refractive Survey

5. **Patients Seen & Co-Managed.** Optometrists reported that they conducted, on average, an initial discussion or screening with about 12 patients during each month. About one-fourth of these patients proceeded to have a pre-operative evaluation in the optometrist's office and about the same number were provided refractive post-operative care by the optometrist.

3. Refractive Surgery Patients Seen by Average OD During the Last 6 Months

Refractive Surgery Patients Seen During Last 6 months	Mean Number	Median Number
For initial discussion/screening	68.5	30.0
For pre-operative evaluation	17.4	8.0
For post-operative care	17.5	8.0

Nearly half of ODs reported that co-managed patients were first seen in their offices on the first day after surgery; nearly the same percentage of surveyed ODs saw co-managed patients between 2-7 days after surgery.

4. Time After Surgery Co-Managed Patients First Seen by ODs

Time Interval	Percent ODs Reporting
One day	46.6
2-7 days	45.8
8-21 days	5.6
22 or more days	2.0

6. Services. About 27 percent of optometrists reported that they do topography (used to map the corneal surface) in their offices. An additional nine percent also do pachymetry (used to measure corneal thickness) in the office. Of all refractive surgical patients, optometrists, on average, prescribed or provided spectacle lenses for 28 percent of those patients; contact lenses for nearly nine percent of patients; non-prescription sunglasses for about 30 percent of all refractive surgical patients; and/or medical treatment related to the surgery for about 28 percent of their refractive surgical patients.

5. OD Services Prescribed/Provided to Refractive Surgical Patients, 2000

Services	Mean % Patients For Whom Services Prescribed/Provided	Median % Patients For Whom Services Prescribed/Provided
Spectacle lenses	28.1	20.0
Contact lenses	8.6	5.0
Non-Rx sunglasses	30.5	20.0
Medical treatment related to surgery	27.7	10.0

7. Refractive Surgery Referrals. On average, optometrists reported that they currently had referral relationships with 2.3 refractive surgery centers. They further reported that they currently had referral relationships with an average 3.0 refractive surgeons. Half of the ODs (median) had referral relationships with at least 2.0 refractive surgery centers and with at least 3.0 refractive surgeons. Optometrists estimated that, on average, 87.0 percent of the patients they referred for refractive surgery returned to them for routine care. ODs market refractive surgical services both within their offices and externally. Of those who did such marketing in 2000, three-fourths (75.1 percent) did so only within the office (internally). One-fourth (25.5

percent) of all respondents also marketed their services outside the office (externally).

Nursing Facility Services

8. Optometrists and Nursing Facilities. Approximately 19.6 percent of optometrists reported that they provided on-site services in 2000 to residents of nursing facilities (nursing homes). Of those providing such services, most visit nursing facilities at least every 90 days. Most ODs providing services to residents of nursing facilities (74.2 percent) see fewer than 100 residents annually. Optometrists serving nursing home residents indicate that, on average, they provide services in 3.4 distinct or separate nursing facilities. Most of the ODs who reported that they did not provide nursing home services gave “not interested”(56.6 percent) as their principal reason, followed by “practice too busy” (42.5 percent).

6. Frequency of Visits to Nursing Facilities, Percent ODs Who Make Visits

Frequency of OD Visits	% ODs
Weekly	8.0
Semi-monthly	9.0
Monthly	23.3
Quarterly	16.9
Semi-annually	14.7
Other	28.1

7. Nursing Facility Residents Visited Annually, Percent ODs Who Make Visits

Number Visited Annually	% ODs
Less than 100	74.2
101 - 200	14.0
201 - 500	6.8
501 -1,000	3.1
1,001 -2,000	0.6
More than 2,000	1.2

Practice Characteristics

9. Type of Practice. Most optometrists (91.3 percent) described themselves as self-employed, while about one in ten (8.7 percent) reported that they were employed by others. More than two-thirds (70.3 percent) of the ODs were in solo practice or in 2-member partnerships or groups.

8. Primary Practice Type, 2000

Self-Employed	Percent*
Solo	48.2
Partnership or group (2-person)	22.1
Partnership or group (3-5 persons)	13.6
Partnership or group (6 or more)	2.6
Optical chain franchisee or leasee	2.3
Independent contractor	1.5
Other self-employed	1.0
All Self-Employed	91.3

Employed by	Percent*
Optometrist(s)	1.4
Ophthalmologist(s)	3.3
HMO	0.9
Hosp/clinic/other multi disciplinary	1.9
Optical chain	0.8
Armed forces/VA/USPHS	0.1
Other employed	0.4

Employed by	Percent*
All Employed by Others	8.8

* Total exceeds 100 percent due to rounding

10. Years in Practice. Half of all reporting ODs (the median number) were in practice 22 years or more during 2000.

9. Years in Practice, 2000

Years in Practice	Percent All ODs
5 years or less	0.4
6 to 10 years	0.5
11 to 15 years	6.7
16-20 years	32.2
21 to 25 years	25.8
26 to 30 years	17.3
31 to 35 years	8.2
36 to 40 years	4.2
41 or more years	4.7