



**KANSAS
OPTOMETRIC
ASSOCIATION**

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I am Gary Robbins, Executive Director of the Kansas Optometric Association. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in support of House Bill 2525.

The bill addresses some ongoing issues with our Medicare carrier and other third party payers interpreting the Kansas Optometry Law and ignoring the authority of the Kansas State Board of Examiners in Optometry. One area of ongoing confusion has been caused by the gradual update of the optometry law during the last 30 years or so to allow optometrists to administer and prescribe topical and oral pharmaceutical drugs, treat glaucoma and remove foreign bodies from the eye. By May 31, 2010, all Kansas optometrists were required to upgrade their licenses to the highest level, so the outdated categories of licensure, along with the accompanying education requirements, have been eliminated with this bill.

The bill also clarifies minor surgical procedures that Kansas optometrists have been safely doing for more than 20 years within existing law. This language was worked out between the Kansas Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons, Kansas Medical Society and Kansas Optometric Association. We deeply appreciate Jerry Slaughter's leadership in facilitating the frank and open discussions that helped us reach a compromise that benefits Kansas patients.

We believe that the language in the bill will help avoid some of the confusion with third party payers and the public.

We would appreciate your support of H.B. 2525.

Kansas Optometry at a Glance

What is an optometrist?

Doctors of optometry are independent, primary health care providers who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures as well as diagnose related systemic conditions. They examine the internal and external structure of the eyes to diagnose eye diseases like glaucoma, cataracts and retinal disorders; systemic diseases like hypertension and diabetes; and vision conditions like nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia. Optometrists also do testing to determine the patient's ability to focus and coordinate the eyes and to judge depth and see colors accurately. They prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses, low vision aids, vision therapy and medicines to treat eye diseases.

What is the optometrist's role in the health care delivery system in Kansas?

Optometrists provide primary eye care services. Not only do optometrists provide functional vision through the use of spectacle and contact lens prescriptions, but a very important part of each eye appointment is a thorough examination of the patient's eye health utilizing the latest technology.

- The anterior segment of the eye is examined with the use of a biomicroscope.
- Retinal examination, most commonly following pupil dilation, is performed with direct ophthalmoscopy and frequently with indirect ophthalmoscopy as well.
- Other technology, such as threshold visual fields, optical coherence tomography, corneal topography and others, are used by many optometrists.

During the course of an eye examination, optometrists frequently detect indications of chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension, as well as neurological disease and other abnormalities that result in a referral to the patient's primary care physician or other health care providers. In addition, optometrists play a role in educating patients about the visual components of chronic conditions, including participating in diabetes education clinics through the Diabetes Center of Wichita founded by Dr. Richard Guthrie.

Optometrists treat primary eye conditions such as conjunctivitis, uveitis, corneal abrasion, foreign body removal and glaucoma. Many optometrists have hospital privileges where they provide consultations for attending physicians or treatment of patients in the emergency room. In many Kansas communities, optometrists are the only eye care providers maintaining a permanent presence.

Eye diseases requiring advanced treatment or surgery, such as retinal detachments, intraocular tumors, diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration, are referred to the appropriate ophthalmologist. Optometrists have close working relationships with ophthalmologists and will frequently utilize consultations when necessary to ensure appropriate treatment. Many offices schedule monthly ophthalmology clinics to make advanced eye care more accessible to their patients. For example, Vitreo-Retinal Consultants conduct monthly clinics in Garden City,

Hutchinson and Salina to accept referrals from optometrists and general ophthalmologists in the region for evaluation and treatment of advanced retinal disease. The clinics in Hutchinson and Salina are conducted in optometric offices.

A large majority of optometrists statewide provide a significant portion of the eye health and vision care to low-income children and adults through Medicaid and HealthWave. In addition, for nearly 20 years, Kansas optometrists have made available no-cost vision assessments to all three-year-old children in the state through the SEE TO LEARN® Program. To date, more than 50,000 children have received care through the program. In addition, optometrists provide charity care to Kansans through Vision USA and local programs, such as HealthAccess, as well as various clinics across the state, and participate in international vision care missions around the world.

Through regional low vision clinics, optometrists are working with the Kansas School for the Blind to provide examinations and develop accommodation strategies for visually impaired students across the state, which allow them to remain in their home utilizing community-based services.