

# Eye care professionals

**W**HEN you have problems with your eyes, you see an eye doctor. Eye doctors have different titles, such as optometrist, ophthalmologist, orthoptist, ocularist, optometrist, etc.

They are eye care professionals, but their roles can vary according to their education, qualifications, training, expertise and experience.

Technicians, medical assistants, and nurses are additional eye care professionals that are vital to vision and eye health services. Today, let us look at the various eye care professionals.

## Optician

An optician can fill a corrective eyewear prescription, but they don't write prescriptions themselves. They do not diagnose or treat eye conditions, and they do not assess vision.

They are trained to fit eyeglasses, contact lenses, and other forms of corrective eyewear. To become an optician, a diploma is required. Most opticians get an associate degree or complete an optician-specific training programme. They may need a specific licence.

## Optometrist

An optometrist provides general vision care to patients, including vision tests and corrective eyewear prescriptions. They can diagnose and treat eye conditions and vision issues.

Optometrists can prescribe medication as needed for eye health issues. To become an optometrist, a bachelor's degree and a doctorate in optometry are needed, which require four years of graduate school. A licence to practice optometry is also needed.

## Ophthalmologist

An ophthalmologist is a doctor of medicine specialising in the eyes and vision.

Ophthalmic surgeons regularly perform surgery on the eye, including cataract surgery, vision correction surgeries, and various other eye-related procedures.

To become an ophthalmologist, a professional must complete postgraduate work, including four years of medical school and four years of specialised training. They must be licenced to practice medicine.

Some ophthalmologists further specialise. For example, they may wish to become a retina specialist, glaucoma specialist, cornea specialist, neuro-ophthalmologist, paediatric ophthalmologist, or ophthalmologist specialising in plastic surgery of the eye.

## Eye care technician

Eye care technicians assist optometrists or ophthalmologists with advanced tests or procedures. To become an ophthalmic technician, a diploma is needed. They'll also need to complete a dedicated training programme, which often results in an associate degree.

## Medical Assistant

Ophthalmic or optometric medical assistants help or perform various tests in a professional eye care facility. They work under the supervision of an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Medical assistants generally need an associate degree, which they can receive in a dedicated medical assistant training programme.

## Ophthalmic Nurse

An ophthalmic nurse is a nursing professional focused on diseases and conditions related to the eyes and vision. These nurses help to diagnose, treat, and care for patients dealing with various eye diseases, conditions, and injuries.

To become an ophthalmic nurse, a



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nursing degree from a nursing school is needed. A nurse can then further specialise in ophthalmology.

## Orthoptist

Orthoptists specialise in the diagnosis and management of eye movement and coordination problems, misalignment of the visual axis, convergence and accommodation problems, and conditions such as amblyopia, strabismus, and binocular vision disorders.

They may assist ophthalmologists in surgery, teach orthoptic students, students of other allied health professions, medical students, and ophthalmology residents and fellows, act as vision researchers, perform vision screening, perform low vision assessments and act as clinical administrators.

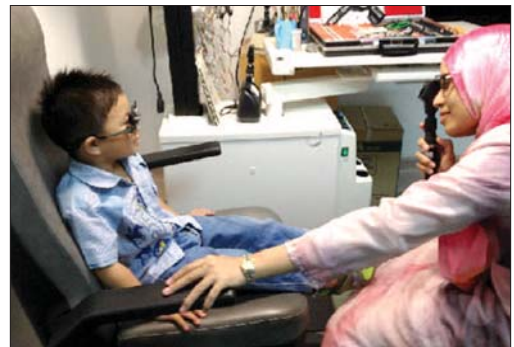
## Ocularist

Ocularists specialise in the fabrication and fitting of ocular prostheses for people who have lost their eyes due to trauma or illness.

## Vision therapist

A vision therapist, usually either an orthoptist or optometrist, works with patients that require vision therapy, such as low-vision patients. Commonly, vision therapy is performed on children who develop problems with their vision.

This type of therapy is, however, generally used in patients who need visual correction but for whom the corrective lenses are not



Checking power of glasses in children: in a hospital clinic setting. (Pic: <http://www.myhealth.gov.my/>)

enough to reverse the condition. Visual therapy in children is performed by optometrists who specialise in children's eye care.

To specialise in vision therapy, doctors must complete extensive post-graduate training beyond their optometric degree, at which time they are eligible to sit for their national boards to become fully certified as specialists in children's vision.

Vision therapists typically use prisms, eye patches, filtered lenses, and computerised systems to conduct therapy sessions.

## Education and training in Malaysia

Currently, there are about 2000 optometrists and 4000 opticians in Malaysia.

Students interested in health care careers such as medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary science, etc, can also consider eye care careers as an alternative.

The following universities offer courses in optometry: Visit their websites for fur-

ther information.

1. Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)
2. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
3. Management & Science University (MSU)
4. SEGi University Bachelor of Optometry (Hons)
5. National Institute of Ophthalmic Science (NIOS)
6. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
7. UCSI University Bachelor of Optometry (Hons)

The following colleges offer Optician courses in Malaysia. Please check their website for more information.

1. Institut Profesional Axismatic
2. Vision College Diploma in Opticianry
3. Business & Management International College

## Q and A

If you have a question, please write to [krishnankanapathy@yahoo.com](mailto:krishnankanapathy@yahoo.com).