

Orthoptist



Career Description

Orthoptics involves the evaluation and treatment of disorders of vision, eye movements, and eye alignment in children and adults. The orthoptist performs a series of diagnostic tests and measurements on patients with visual disorders, including lazy eye, strabismus (misaligned eyes), and double vision. Through interpretation of testing procedures and clinical evaluation, the orthoptist helps the ophthalmologist design a treatment plan, which may involve treatment by the orthoptist, surgical treatment by the ophthalmologist, or some combination of the two.



Employment Characteristics

The orthoptist is the liaison between an ophthalmologist and the patient, assisting in the explanation and execution of the treatment. Orthoptists work in a variety of professional settings:

- As a consultant, the orthoptist may travel to several offices or clinics to see patients or work as a professional advisor to vision-related community agencies.
- An orthoptist may serve as a director of state or local vision screening programs.
- Academic opportunities also exist for individuals who want to offer clinical expertise and instruction to orthoptic students, medical students, and resident physicians. Orthoptists may also participate in clinical research and in the presentation and publication of scientific papers.

Orthoptists possess diagnostic ability, technical understanding, and therapeutic skills. In addition, orthoptists should be able to work well with young children, who make up a large portion of orthoptic patients. It is not uncommon for these young patients to have physical, mental, or emotional disabilities.



Salary

Orthoptists receive compensation at the high end of that earned by other health professionals, including physical therapists and physician assistants. For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Length. Orthoptist programs require 2 years of post-graduate study.

Prerequisites. A baccalaureate degree is required; however, exceptions are considered on an individual basis. The Graduate Record Examination is not required.

Curriculum. Lectures, textbooks, journal publications, and proceedings from scientific ophthalmology symposia and conferences form the basis of the didactic teaching. Primary subject areas include anatomy, neuroanatomy, physiology, pharmacology, ophthalmic optics, diagnostic testing and measurement, orthoptic treatment, systemic disease and ocular motor disorders, principles of surgery, and basic ophthalmic examination techniques, as well as genetics, child development, learning disabilities, clinical research methods, and medical writing. In most programs, preparation and presentation of scientific papers are usually required during the second year of education.

Programs are typically structured around an 8-hour day. On average, an orthoptic student will evaluate more than 1,500 patients and observe many more during the course of study. Extensive clinical experience is part of every program.



Inquiries

Inquiries regarding a career in orthoptics, certification, and program accreditation (brochures about the profession are available upon request):

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