Whereas, Our AMA defines surgery as “the diagnostic or therapeutic treatment of conditions or disease processes by any instruments causing localized alteration or transposition of live human tissue which include lasers, ultrasound, ionizing radiation, scalpels, probes, and needles”;¹⁻² and

Whereas, Current AMA policy is unclear on who should perform surgery as defined in the previous clause, stating in one policy that surgery should be performed only by “licensed physicians (defined as doctors of medicine or osteopathy) who meet appropriate professional standards”¹ and in another policy that laser surgery as defined above may be performed by any of “those categories of practitioners currently licensed by the state to perform surgical services”;³ and

Whereas, In the states of Oklahoma (OK),⁴ Louisiana (LA),⁵ and Kentucky (KY),⁶ surgeries such as ophthalmic anterior chamber laser surgeries and several scalpel surgeries are legally permitted to be performed by licensed doctors of optometry (hereafter, “optometrists” or “ODs”), and several states allow their state Boards of Optometry the ability to define the scope of optometric practice in their states, often explicitly including ophthalmic surgeries;⁵⁻⁷ and

Whereas, A major rationale in favor of optometrists performing ophthalmic surgeries is that geographic access to ophthalmologists is poor in rural areas; yet research suggests that there is no significant difference in geographic access to procedures performed by optometrists compared to ophthalmologists in the states in which optometrists are legally allowed to perform surgical procedures;⁹ and

Whereas, Schools of optometry outside OK, LA, and KY cannot legally provide optometry students clinical experience with these procedures on patients, yet OD degrees from many schools of optometry outside these states are considered sufficient for licensure and the legal performance of ophthalmic surgeries in LA¹⁰ and KY¹¹⁻¹⁵; and

Whereas, Graduated ODs whose degrees do not fulfill licensure requirements in OK, LA, and KY may take one or both of two 16 hour courses, which contain no procedural experience on patients,¹⁶⁻¹⁹ to sufficiently fulfill the licensure requirements of OK,¹⁹ LA,¹⁰ and KY¹¹⁻¹⁵ and thereafter legally perform laser and scalpel procedures, respectively, in those states; and

Whereas, The AMA has noted all surgical procedures as defined in the first clause to be invasive and carry inherent risk to patient safety;¹ and

Whereas, In the states of Oklahoma (OK),⁴ Louisiana (LA),⁵ and Kentucky (KY),⁶ surgeries such as ophthalmic anterior chamber laser surgeries and several scalpel surgeries are legally permitted to be performed by licensed doctors of optometry (hereafter, “optometrists” or “ODs”), and several states allow their state Boards of Optometry the ability to define the scope of optometric practice in their states, often explicitly including ophthalmic surgeries;⁵⁻⁷ and

Whereas, A major rationale in favor of optometrists performing ophthalmic surgeries is that geographic access to ophthalmologists is poor in rural areas; yet research suggests that there is no significant difference in geographic access to procedures performed by optometrists compared to ophthalmologists in the states in which optometrists are legally allowed to perform surgical procedures;⁹ and

Whereas, Schools of optometry outside OK, LA, and KY cannot legally provide optometry students clinical experience with these procedures on patients, yet OD degrees from many schools of optometry outside these states are considered sufficient for licensure and the legal performance of ophthalmic surgeries in LA¹⁰ and KY¹¹⁻¹⁵; and

Whereas, Graduated ODs whose degrees do not fulfill licensure requirements in OK, LA, and KY may take one or both of two 16 hour courses, which contain no procedural experience on patients,¹⁶⁻¹⁹ to sufficiently fulfill the licensure requirements of OK,¹⁹ LA,¹⁰ and KY¹¹⁻¹⁵ and thereafter legally perform laser and scalpel procedures, respectively, in those states; and

Whereas, The AMA has noted all surgical procedures as defined in the first clause to be invasive and carry inherent risk to patient safety;¹ and

Whereas, In the states of Oklahoma (OK),⁴ Louisiana (LA),⁵ and Kentucky (KY),⁶ surgeries such as ophthalmic anterior chamber laser surgeries and several scalpel surgeries are legally permitted to be performed by licensed doctors of optometry (hereafter, “optometrists” or “ODs”), and several states allow their state Boards of Optometry the ability to define the scope of optometric practice in their states, often explicitly including ophthalmic surgeries;⁵⁻⁷ and

Whereas, A major rationale in favor of optometrists performing ophthalmic surgeries is that geographic access to ophthalmologists is poor in rural areas; yet research suggests that there is no significant difference in geographic access to procedures performed by optometrists compared to ophthalmologists in the states in which optometrists are legally allowed to perform surgical procedures;⁹ and

Whereas, Schools of optometry outside OK, LA, and KY cannot legally provide optometry students clinical experience with these procedures on patients, yet OD degrees from many schools of optometry outside these states are considered sufficient for licensure and the legal performance of ophthalmic surgeries in LA¹⁰ and KY¹¹⁻¹⁵; and

Whereas, Graduated ODs whose degrees do not fulfill licensure requirements in OK, LA, and KY may take one or both of two 16 hour courses, which contain no procedural experience on patients,¹⁶⁻¹⁹ to sufficiently fulfill the licensure requirements of OK,¹⁹ LA,¹⁰ and KY¹¹⁻¹⁵ and thereafter legally perform laser and scalpel procedures, respectively, in those states; and

Whereas, The AMA has noted all surgical procedures as defined in the first clause to be invasive and carry inherent risk to patient safety;¹ and
Whereas, Surgery performed by those without sufficient background in systemic
pathophysiology and the practice of medicine, and supervised clinical experience performing on
patients the procedures for which they are to be licensed, such as is acquired in allopatic or
osteopathic medical school and subsequent appropriate surgical residencies and fellowships,
represents unnecessary risk to patients;¹ and

Whereas, This risk has been quantified by outcomes data suggesting higher likelihood of repeat
surgeries when performed by optometrists as compared to ophthalmologists;²¹ and

Whereas, This complete absence of physician supervision in performing surgeries or in surgical
training, and lack of any training performing such surgeries on patients prior to licensure to
perform them independently, is a problem unique to the field of optometry and separate from
current concerns about the scope of practice of other mid-level providers; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That our American Medical Association support legislation prohibiting optometrists
from performing surgical procedures as defined by AMA policies H-475.983, “Definition of
Surgery,” and H-475.988, “Laser Surgery” (New HOD Policy); and be it further

RESOLVED, That our AMA encourage state medical associations to support state legislation
and rulemaking prohibiting optometrists from performing surgical procedures as defined by AMA

Fiscal Note: Not yet determined

Received: 10/31/18

⁵. Louisiana State Legislature. Provides relative to the practice of optometry and the regulation of such profession. 2014 Regular
RELEVANT AMA POLICY

Definition of Surgery H-475.983
Our AMA adopts the following definition of ‘surgery’ from American College of Surgeons Statement ST-11:
Surgery is performed for the purpose of structurally altering the human body by the incision or destruction of tissues and is part of the practice of medicine. Surgery also is the diagnostic or therapeutic treatment of conditions or disease processes by any instruments causing localized alteration or transposition of live human tissue which include lasers, ultrasound, ionizing radiation, scalps, probes, and needles. The tissue can be cut, burned, vaporized, frozen, sutured, probed, or manipulated by closed reductions for major dislocations or fractures, or otherwise altered by mechanical, thermal, light-based, electromagnetic, or chemical means. Injection of diagnostic or therapeutic substances into body cavities, internal organs, joints, sensory organs, and the central nervous system also is considered to be surgery (this does not include the administration by nursing personnel of some injections, subcutaneous, intramuscular, and intravenous, when ordered by a physician). All of these surgical procedures are invasive, including those that are performed with lasers, and the risks of any surgical procedure are not eliminated by using a light knife or laser in place of a metal knife, or scalpel. Patient safety and quality of care are paramount and, therefore, patients should be assured that individuals who perform these types of surgery are licensed physicians (defined as doctors of medicine or osteopathy) who meet appropriate professional standards.
Citation: Res. 212; A-07; Reaffirmed: BOT Rep. 16, A-13

Laser Surgery H-475.988
The AMA supports the position that revision, destruction, incision or other structural alteration of human tissue using laser is surgery.
Citation: (Res. 316, A-96; Reaffirmed: CSAPH Rep. 3, A-06; Reaffirmed: BOT Rep. 16, A-13)

Laser Surgery H-475.989
Our AMA (1) adopts the policy that laser surgery should be performed only by individuals licensed to practice medicine and surgery or by those categories of practitioners currently licensed by the state to perform surgical services; and (2) encourages state medical associations to support state legislation and rulemaking in support of this policy.
Citation: (Sub. Res. 39, I-90; Reaffirmed: Sunset Report, I-00; Reaffirmed: CMS Rep. 6, A-10; Reaffirmed: BOT Rep. 16, A-13)