



RANZCO

The Royal Australian
and New Zealand
College of Ophthalmologists

Position Statement: The Important Role of Orthoptists in Eye Care Delivery

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THE MEDICAL EYE SPECIALISTS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this position paper is to highlight the importance of maintaining the orthoptist workforce as a key component of the eye health care professional team led by ophthalmologists.

2. Role of orthoptists

Orthoptists are essential members of the eye health care professional team, who play a crucial role in providing eye health services to the population. Their particular skills cover a number of areas, including:

- Public health, in particular vision screening and detecting vision problems in the pre-school population, enabling early intervention and prevention of visual disability
- Low vision assessment and rehabilitation for children
- Clinical assessment of ocular motility and strabismus disorders
- Visual rehabilitation for stroke patients who have lesions that affect the visual centre in the brain; this is becoming an increasingly important part of rehabilitation for such patients
- Clinical assessment of patients (in conjunction with ophthalmologists) and performing investigations such as computerised perimetry, fluorescein angiography, OCT examinations and ocular biometry – which are essential prerequisites in management of the common causes of blindness in our community such as cataract, macular degeneration, diabetes and glaucoma
- Practice management in both private and public settings – where their clinical background adds valuable knowledge and skills to health management
- Providing technical expertise to the eye health care industry.

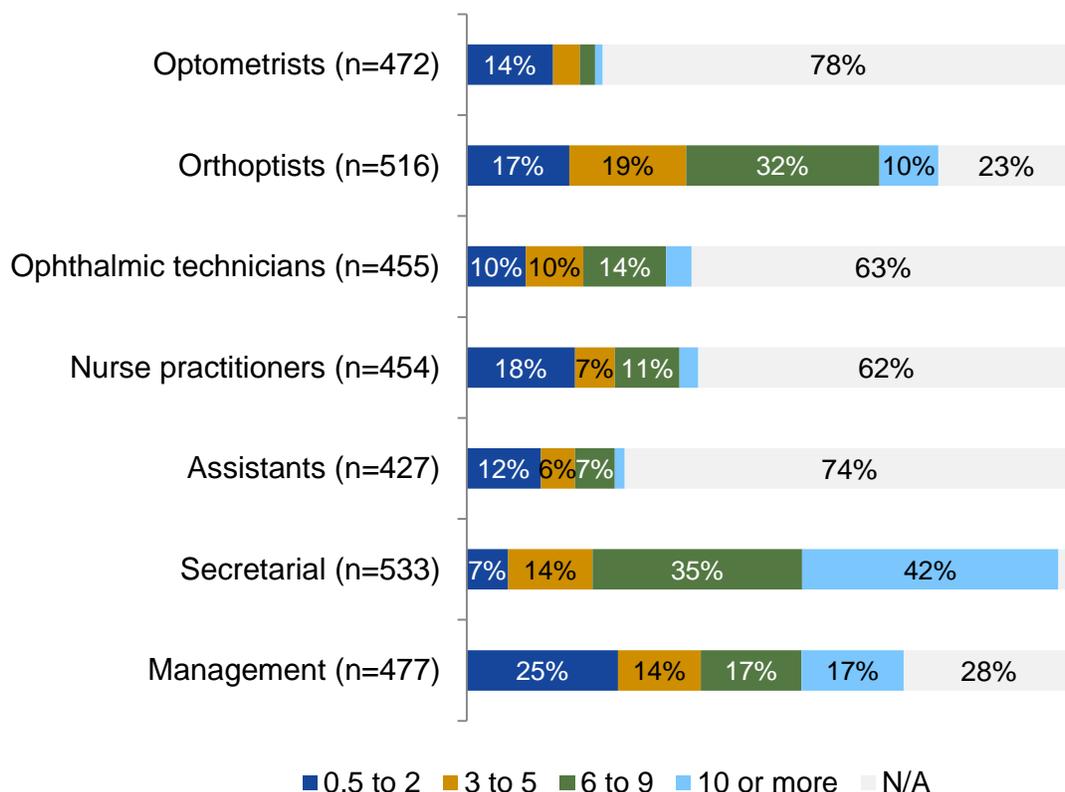
3. Relationship with Ophthalmologists

Ophthalmologists and orthoptists have had a close working relationship for many years – in both the private and public sector. This synergistic relationship is analogous to that which exists between radiographers and radiologists. With their skills covering several professional areas (as outlined above), orthoptists play a crucial role in eye health care delivery – especially in busy public hospital eye clinics where resources are limited and patients are many.

Professional links exist between The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO), with several orthoptists being associate members of RANZCO. The Annual RANZCO Scientific Congress provides for opportunities to foster this professional relationship between orthoptists and ophthalmologists, and explore synergies for ultimately enhancing patient safety and efficiencies in eye care delivery.

The important relationship with ophthalmologists can be best illustrated by the results of a recent survey conducted by RANZCO, which concluded that orthoptists were the allied health cadre most utilised by practicing ophthalmologists (see Figure 1 below). More than three quarters of the survey respondents indicated that they utilise orthoptists, with 42% of them doing so in six or more sessions per week.

Figure 1: Practising RANZCO Fellows' utilisation of other cadres (by number of sessions per week)¹



4. Orthoptic Work Force and Training

There are at least around 500 orthoptists in Australia. The profession is self-regulated. As is the case with many health-related craft groups, the work force is ageing and significant numbers of orthoptists will be retiring over the next few years.

With the University of Sydney now phasing out training for orthoptists, orthoptic education will only be offered by La Trobe University in Victoria. The degree programme is designed to develop professional expertise for clinical practice. Clinical placements are an integral part of the courses and students in both programs gain

¹ RANZCO workforce survey, 2012

clinical experience in the hospital and specialist clinical settings. The La Trobe program comprises a Bachelor of Health Sciences and Master of Orthoptics (4 Years) and Master of Orthoptics (2 Years)².

Given the critical role of orthoptists in the eye health care team, and the demand for their services, RANZCO believes that maintaining the training program for orthoptists is a critical workforce issue.

² <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/courses/orthoptics>