

AWARENESS OF THE EYE HEALTH CARE TEAM BY OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

The orthoptist, ophthalmologist, optician and optometrist can only function at an optimum level if other health professionals are aware of their duties and capabilities. The need for interdisciplinary communication is ever increasing as technology expands and the population grows.

The aim of this paper is to explore the awareness that health professionals have of the eye health care team. The results indicate that this awareness can be improved and that steps should be taken to increase interdisciplinary skills so that the team approach can be maximised.

Key words: orthoptist, ophthalmologist, optician, optometrist, interdisciplinary, team approach.

INTRODUCTION

There has been much rhetoric about the improved patient care that arises from the performance of individual health professionals acting together as an interdisciplinary health care team. At the basis of this team approach there must be an awareness and understanding of the roles of each member.

This development in health professionals of an awareness of the role of their colleagues, can be attained in two ways. Firstly, as a result of their training as a student health professional, and secondly, as a result of clinical experience in the working situation.

Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences is a College of Advanced Education which provides training for a number of allied health professions. This setting would seem ideal for the education and encouragement of the team approach. It should, therefore, be of interest to evaluate the awareness of those academics who provide this education, since it is they who are

responsible for developing the interdisciplinary approach to human services in the student.

For this reason it was decided to assess the awareness of the eye health care team by academic staff at Lincoln Institute. This group being representative of the two main areas where the team approach should be paramount—they are both health professionals and educators.

METHOD

A self administered questionnaire was sent through the interdepartmental mail to 42 academics. This sample population represented 20% of the total academic staff and was randomly selected from the four largest training schools, these being Nursing, Communication Disorders, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy. A total of 25 persons responded giving a return rate of 59.5% (Table 1).

Of the respondents 76% were female and 24% were male. The percentages of those in each age group are found in Table 2.

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TABLE 1
The Sample Population

	No. sent	No. returned	% of total sample from each school
Nursing	8	4	16
Comm. disorders	8	6	24
Occ. therapy	10	5	20
Physio-therapy	16	10	40
	42	25	100

RESULTS

The first question asked the subjects whether they had heard of these members of the eye health care team—orthoptist, ophthalmologist, optician and optometrist. Eighty-four per cent had heard of orthoptist, 96% of ophthalmologists, and all the respondents (100%) had heard of optician and optometrist. However, of

TABLE 2
Percentage per Age Group

20-30 years	12
30-40 years	52
40-50 years	24
>50 years	12

TABLE 3
Frequency of Places of Employment

	Orthoptist	Ophthalmologist	Optician	Optometrist
Hospital	16	22	4	7
Private practice	10	22	23	24
Other	6	3	—	—
Not known	8	1	2	1

TABLE 4
No. of Visits and Reasons Given

	Orthoptist	Ophthalmologist	Optician	Optometrist
Vision	2	9	2	7
Headaches	—	1	—	—
Squint	—	1	—	—
Spots before eyes	—	1	—	—
Glasses	—	—	5	8
Total	2	12	7	15

these only 76.1% could define the duties of the orthoptist, 91.6% for ophthalmologist and 88% for optician and optometrist.

These findings support those of Levi et al¹ who in a survey of 643 members of the public found that the most frequently correct response was for the definition of ophthalmologist (80.4%), with optometrist (72.7%) and optician (66.2%). Unfortunately they did not include the orthoptist in their questionnaire.

The subjects were then asked where they might find each of the professionals working (Table 3).

The next question asked if they had ever visited these professionals, and if so, for what reasons (Table 4).

The subjects were asked if a referral was necessary to visit these professionals (Table 5).

The subjects were then asked to state what training was necessary for each profession; 56% gave a correct response for orthoptics, 68% for ophthalmology and 20% for optometry, but no-one knew about opticianary.

There was a question about who could provide the following treatments—glasses, eye exercises, eye drops and eye surgery (Table 6).

Finally, the subjects were asked to indicate which one professional they would visit if they had the symptoms or complaints listed (Table 7).

TABLE 5
Nos Indicating Knowledge of Referral System

	Orthoptist	Ophthalmologist	Optician	Optometrist
Referral necessary	5	17	1	6
Referral not necessary	6	5	19	13
Not known	15	3	5	6

TABLE 6
Responses Regarding Treatment

	Orthoptist	Ophthalmologist	Optician	Optometrist
Glasses	2	11	21	22
Eye exercises	20	15	9	14
Eye drops	3	23	4	7
Eye surgery	—	24	1	1
Not known	5	1	2	1

TABLE 7
Nos Who Would Visit the Professionals for these Symptoms/Complaints

	Orthoptist	Ophthalmologist	Optician	Optometrist	Not Known
Sore eye(s)	2	17	3	2	1
Painful eye(s)	1	20	1	2	1
Itchy eye(s)	2	17	2	2	2
Spots in front of eye(s)	1	18	3	2	1
Crossed eye(s)	4	16	3	1	1
Red eye(s)	1	20	2	1	1
Sudden loss of vision	—	23	1	—	1
Blurred vision	1	17	2	4	1
Double vision	2	17	2	3	1
Headaches	—	17	3	5	—
Old glasses	1	2	6	16	—
Glasses broken	—	—	11	14	—
Glasses lost	—	—	8	16	1

At the conclusion of the questionnaire general comments were requested; 32% responded expressing concern about their lack of knowledge in the area surveyed and of determination to improve their awareness of the eye health care team.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that despite a high percentage of health professionals 'having heard' of the eye health care team needs to be improved. It seems that of the four professionals, the orthoptist is the one that the respondents were less aware of. This supports the findings of Bartley² and Barnard.³

By increasing health professionals awareness, the interdisciplinary approach to patient care should become more effective and provide maximum services to the patient. Through education in this area the image of the orthoptist will be improved and the notion of the team approach will become a functional one.

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