



POLICY STATEMENT

Orthoptists as Physician Extenders

AAPOS recognizes Orthoptists as a valuable adjunct to the practice of pediatric ophthalmology and to ophthalmologists who treat strabismus and binocular vision disorders. Orthoptists are qualified to independently evaluate and treat pediatric and adult patients with eye movement and binocular vision disorders.

Background

Definition

Orthoptics ("straight eyes") is the study of the ophthalmic science that pertains to vision, visual function, eye movements and binocular coordination. The American Medical Association recognizes **Orthoptics** as a health care profession involving the evaluation and treatment of disorders of vision, eye movements, and eye alignment in children and adults.¹ An orthoptist is a health care professional who specializes in visual function assessment and neuromuscular anomalies of the eyes.

Orthoptists as mid-level providers or physician assistants

The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) lists **Orthoptists** (profession 29-1199.05) under the category of Health Diagnosing and Treating Practitioners.² This is the same category shared by Nurse Practitioners and Nurse Anesthetists. The ETA divides jobs into zones according to the extent of preparation needed to enter the field; the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary; the tasks, work activities, work context, and tools and technology used in the execution of duties. There are five such "Job Zones". **Orthoptics** is categorized in Zone Five: Extensive Preparation Needed.²

Orthoptists are physician extenders who function in a manner similar to the nurse practitioner (ARNP) or physician assistant (PA). **Certified Orthoptists** have the technical expertise necessary to evaluate and diagnose disorders of binocular vision and ocular motility. They are also certified to design and manage a program of non-surgical management of these disorders, under the indirect supervision of an ophthalmologist, exactly as a PA or ARNP practices.

Education and Credentialing

¹ Health Care Careers Directory, 2010-2011, American Medical Association, Chicago, IL; www.ama-assn.org/go/alliedhealth

² <http://online.onetcenter.org/>



The American Orthoptic Council (AOC)³ establishes the requirements for education in **Orthoptics**, accredits orthoptic teaching programs, and certifies orthoptist candidates through a written and oral examination.

A baccalaureate degree is required for entrance into an Orthoptic program. Orthoptic students must complete a 24-month program of study in an accredited Orthoptic program, and each student must successfully pass the AOC certification process to become a **certified orthoptist (CO)**. Orthoptists must re-certify every three years, showing proof of continuing education that includes attendance at scientific meetings.

Supervision of Orthoptic Services

Medicare recognizes and defines three levels of supervision for physician extenders performing diagnostic tests.^{4,5} These are General, Direct, and Personal. The Sensorimotor Examination (**92060**) and the Orthoptic Training (**92065**) procedures require the lowest level: *General* supervision. This level of supervision *does not require* the physician's presence in the facility during the procedure, though the procedure is performed under the overall direction and control of the physician. In addition, the supervising physician does not need to be the physician who ordered the diagnostic test or service.

Clinical Practice

The practice of orthoptics is varied and may be practiced in a variety of physical locations including hospitals, clinics, private offices and academic medical institutions. Orthoptists treat many non-surgical disorders of ocular motility and binocular vision. Patients may be referred for sensorimotor evaluation from within the practice or from the medical community. Orthoptists may work in conjunction with a physician in the evaluation and workup of a patient, or may work independently, evaluating and treating patients with binocular vision and eye movement and alignment disorders.

Orthoptists may also participate in clinical research or education of medical students, residents, and orthoptic students.

³ www.orthoptics.org

⁴ Medicare's Carrier Manual, Section 2050.

⁵ ASBELL RL: Proper Coding for Diagnostic Tests. *Ophthalmol Options*; Oct 2007.