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Northern Eye

Robert M. Currier, D.O., FOCOO

127 PARK PLACE • ALPENA, MI 49707 • (989) 354-3171

205 S. Bradley Hwy. • Rogers City, MI 49779

Michigan and Nationwide Toll Free: 1-800-77-1015 • E-Mail: Northerneye@i2k.net

How Are Ophthalmologists, Optometrists and Opticians Different?

Ophthalmologists (Eye M.D.s and D.O.s) are different from optometrists (O.D.s) and opticians in their training and in what they can diagnose and treat.

As a medical doctor, an ophthalmologist is licensed to practice medicine and surgery. He or she diagnoses and treats all eye diseases, performs eye surgery, and prescribes and fits glasses and contact lenses.

Ophthalmologists complete:

- 4 years of college;
- 4 years of medical school;
- 1 year of internship;
- 3 years, at least, of residency (hospital-based training) in the diagnosis and medical and surgical treatment of eye disorders.

After four years of college and eight additional years of medical education and training, an ophthalmologist must pass a rigorous examination given by the American Board of Ophthalmology.

While all ophthalmologists specialize in eye problems and can treat all conditions, some decide to concentrate in a specific area of medical or surgical eye care. These doctors are called subspecialists. They usually complete a fellowship, which is one or two more years of training in the chosen area. Some subspecialists focus on the treatment of a disease, such as glaucoma. Others subspecialize in a particular part of the eye such as the retina. Pediatric ophthalmologists subspecialize in treating eye disease in children.

An **optometrist** is a doctor of optometry, licensed to practice optometry. Optometrists determine the need for glasses and contact lenses, prescribe optical correction, and screen for abnormalities of the eye. They attend two to four years of college and four years of optometry school.

In some states, optometrists can prescribe a limited amount of drugs to help diagnose and treat certain eye conditions. Optometrists generally do not perform surgery.

An **optician**—licensed by a state to make optical aids—fits, adjusts and dispenses glasses, contact lenses and other optical devices on written prescriptions of a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist. Training for an optician varies from a preceptorship to two years of opticianry school.