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## Opticians Are a Critical Part of the Vision Care Team

**J**ames M. Morris, chief executive officer and general counsel for the United Opticians Association (UOA), believes opticians are essential to ensuring quality vision care outcomes for patients. "While optometrists and ophthalmologists diagnose and treat eye conditions, it is the optician who is many times the first and last individual seen by the patient, and who sees the patient in between doctor visits. The optician ensures that patients receive properly fitted eyewear tailored to their specific visual needs," he said.

Precision in lens selection, accurate fitting and proper adjustments are crucial to achieving the best possible vision correction. "Poorly fitted eyewear can lead to headaches, eyestrain and even long-term damage, diminishing the effectiveness of prescribed treatments. Opticians bridge the gap between diagnosis and daily function, providing patients with the clarity they need to work, drive and engage fully in their lives," Morris said.

The United Opticians Association, he added, is committed to elevating the profession of opticianry and advocating for policies that recognize opticians as a critical part of the vision care team, focusing on areas of regulatory inclusion, prescription release and consumer rights, scope of practice, licensing protection and expanding vision benefits.

"Through these, and many other initiatives, the United Opticians Association is ensuring that opticians receive the recognition, support and professional opportunities they deserve while safeguarding the public's access to qualified vision care professionals. Opticians are not just dispensers of eyewear,



James M. Morris.

they are essential health care providers whose work directly impacts patients' quality of life," he said.

Morris said that licensed and certified opticians are trained in the latest lens technologies, frame designs and fitting techniques to optimize visual outcomes. He said their expertise is especially critical for complex prescriptions, pediatric patients, individuals with low vision, and those requiring specialty eyewear such as occupational or sports-related prescriptions.

"By ensuring that every patient receives high-quality, well-fitted eyewear, opticians play an indispensable role in eye health and overall well-being," he said. A properly certified optician may be able, during a contact lens fitting or spectacle fitting, to identify and refer for further treatment for such serious conditions as keratoconus, diabetes, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration, dry eyes, retinal de-

tachment, amblyopia and other critical eye conditions, according to Morris.

He said opticians are often the most accessible vision care professionals in their communities, making them a frontline resource for individuals who may otherwise struggle to obtain proper eyewear.

"This is particularly vital in underserved communities where barriers to vision care, whether economic, geographic or systemic, are prevalent," he said. "In many rural and low-income urban areas, access to comprehensive vision care is limited, leaving many individuals without corrective eyewear simply because they cannot afford it or do not have providers nearby.

Morris continued, "Opticians play a critical role in closing this gap by working in local optical shops, clinics, mobile vision programs and charitable initiatives that bring eyecare to those who need it most, and by being available for follow-ups for vision-related issues when a patient is not able to follow up with an ophthalmologist or optometrist."

He said opticians educate their communities on eye health, proper eyewear maintenance and the importance of regular eye exams. He noted many also participate in outreach programs to provide free or low-cost eyewear to children, seniors and individuals with disabilities.

"By working directly within their communities, opticians help improve not just individual vision but also public health, workplace productivity and educational outcomes for students who rely on clear vision to succeed in school," he said. ■