

Orthoptist

■ Job Description

Orthoptics is the clinical science of ocular motility, binocular vision, and related disorders of the eyes. An orthoptist is an eye muscle specialist who works under the supervision of an ophthalmologist (MD). Diagnosis and non-surgical treatment of eye muscle anomalies are the primary responsibilities of an orthoptist, although most master a wide range of ophthalmic technical skills in addition to general orthoptics. Depending upon his or her areas of interest and expertise, an orthoptist may choose to be involved in patient care, clinical research, and/or education.

■ Job Settings

Hospitals, clinics, ophthalmologist's offices, medical schools, research facilities, and settings abroad

■ Projected Need

Demand for individuals who specialize in diagnosis and treatment of disorders in the eye muscles is great, as there are few training programs and few completers in this area of medicine. It is expected the need for skilled orthoptists will continue as the population grows and ages, requiring further treatment of eye disorders.

■ Salaries

Orthoptists receive salaries at the high end of that earned by other health professionals, including physical therapists and physician assistants.

■ Related Careers

Ophthalmic medical personnel, optometrist, optometric assistant, and physician assistant

■ Differences in Training

To become an orthoptist, a person must complete a two year training program that combines clinical practice and classroom instruction. To enter study for this work, applicants must have a bachelor's degree.

High school and college courses in biology, physics, anatomy, mathematics, physiology, child

development, and psychology offer useful background for the study of orthoptics.

Orthoptics programs are clinically oriented. Students spend much of their time examining patients in a clinical setting, usually in a hospital, or private, or group practice associated with a medical school. Students work under the supervision of a certified orthoptist and ophthalmologist. The course work takes two years. Students also attend lectures regularly. Most orthoptic candidates are required to research and present a scientific paper at a regional meeting as a second-year project. Advanced credit may be granted to ophthalmic medical personnel with JCAHPO certification. Students granted advanced standing may complete training in one year. All programs are accredited by the American Orthoptic Council (AOC).

A list of training programs nationwide may be obtained from the AOC, or found in the *Health Professions Career and Education Directory*, published by the AMA.

■ Credentials

A certificate of orthoptics is awarded upon successful completion of a written and an oral/practical exam. The exam is offered once each year by the AOC.

■ Advanced Training

The American Association of Certified Orthoptists, a professional organization for practicing orthoptists, provides continuing education courses and credits for updating and gaining knowledge and skills.

■ Resources

American Orthoptic Council
3914 Nakoma Road
Madison, WI 53711
Phone: 608.233.5383
<http://www.orthoptics.org>