

2/8/2021

Health Care Committee Members:

The ophthalmologists at EyeHealth Northwest would like to register our alarm about the introduction of HB 2541 by the Oregon Optometric Physicians Association. HB2541 would grant optometrists, who have never completed medical school or surgical residency, the right to perform scalpel and laser surgery on and around the eye.

We strongly feel that this legislation compromises the safety and quality of surgical care for Oregon eye patients by removing the current standards of medical, clinical, and surgical training required to perform eye surgery. These safeguards currently ensure that Oregonians have access to the safest and highest quality surgical eye care. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose HB 2541.

Optometrists are our friends and colleagues. Together the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Optometric Association have worked to provide guidance to ophthalmologists and optometrists in the proper sharing of care. We appreciate their valuable addition to the eye care team.

At EyeHealth Northwest, our 27 ophthalmologists work in concert with our 14 optometrists every day to provide safe, high quality care to our patients. However, granting optometrists surgical privileges for which they have not been adequately trained is not acceptable.

Eye tissue is extremely delicate. Once it is damaged, it is often impossible to fix. Eye surgery is considered one of the most difficult and delicate surgeries performed by medical doctors. Despite this, optometrists are seeking a carve-out exception for certain laser and scalpel procedures, based on the misguided idea that these procedures are inherently low risk. While some procedures are higher risk than others, no procedures are without risk, particularly when attempted by inexperienced providers.

All ophthalmology residency programs must adhere to the national education criteria set by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). The ACGME sets the minimum standards for becoming a qualified surgeon. Optometry training is not subject to the objective, proven, national ACGME standards, which include four years of undergraduate education, four years of medical education, one year of internship seeing complex medical and surgical patients, and three years of ophthalmology residency. Many ophthalmologists also include an additional year or two of fellowship training to further master medical and surgical care of their patients. In total, ophthalmology training involves more than 17,000 hours of clinical experience and training.

In contrast, the current optometric curriculum includes only a small fraction of the educational fundamentals established by the ACGME. Optometry school is limited to only 2,300 hours of clinical experience and the focus is on primary eyecare. This is in no way sufficient to perform eye surgery. To suggest that traditional medical and surgical training is no longer necessary to safely perform eye surgery strikes us as dangerously misguided.

In the interest of patient safety and to maintain the integrity of medical practice in the state of Oregon, we ask to you vote NO on HB2541.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions, we have provided our contact numbers.

Sincerely,

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