

## For Optometrists' Eyes Only

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**Citation :** SEUN AYOADE. (2022). For Optometrists' Eyes Only, *J Pediatr Neonatal Biol* 7(1): 68

Put an optometrist and an ophthalmologist in the same room. The inferiority complex exuding from the optometrist will be so thick you can cut it. Conversely, the superiority complex emanating from the ophthalmologist will be so palpable you could bottle and sell it. How did this come about? A hundred years ago, optometrists tested people's eyesight, recommended, and sold them spectacles. They did not diagnose eye diseases, prescribe medications or perform eye surgery. Today they do-although the range of surgery they perform falls below the scope of surgeries done by the ophthalmologists. How did this come about?

In 1937 Reader's Digest did an expose on the optometry profession [1] It was found that under intense pressure of the vested financial interests that employed the optometrists, the sale of spectacles was given priority over all else. Optometrists had to meet a sales deadline or they could lose their jobs. Predictably, the patients' eyes paid the price in this rat race. The resulting public outcry made optometrists revamp their occupation. Here the great blunder was made. Instead of divorcing the profession from the greedy store owners and insisting that after recommending spectacles the optometrist refer the patient to the ophthalmologist to find out if any underlying conditions existed another route was taken. Optometrists simply increased the number of years and level of expertise needed to become an optometrist. In other words optometrists started doing many of the tasks of the ophthalmologists. The new diffident "half baked" optometrist of today is a far cry from the proud optometrist of the past who knew his prerogative. The optometrist of today is often the butt of jokes. The ophthalmologist sniggers at him. The dentist, the General Practitioner and even some Physician Assistants look down on optometrists of to-

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**Submitted:** 05 May 2022; **Accepted:** 16 May 2022; **Published:** 18 May 2022

day as scholastically challenged people who couldn't make it into medical, PA or pharmacy school. There are two ways to end this conundrum-

1. Optometry becomes a two year diploma affair. This type of optometrist will sight test, recommend glasses and refer patients to ophthalmologists to detect any underlying conditions. Conversely, patients who see ophthalmologists directly will get referred (after diagnosis) by the ophthalmologist to the optometrist to get their glasses.
2. The optometry profession goes the full hog and optometrists begin to do any and EVERY thing ophthalmologists do.

Hence the terms "optometrist" and "ophthalmologist" will become as interchangeable as "Doctor" and "Physician". They will simply refer to two pathways to the same profession [such as MD and DO among American Physicians]. In other words both the optometrist and the ophthalmologist will do the same thing and get the same salary.

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