

Roles within the Refractive Surgery Team



The ROYAL COLLEGE of
OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

Your vision correction surgery team

The eye surgeon you choose for vision correction surgery will remain responsible for your care from the first consultation until discharge when your vision is stable after surgery; but he or she will be working closely with other staff, including ophthalmic nurses, technicians and optometrists, to provide the best quality care.

Key stages are:

- The pre-surgery consultation – this is when you will meet your surgeon to discuss procedure choice, and is normally preceded by a series of tests conducted by optometrists and other staff to provide all the relevant information about your eyes. These tests may occur on the day as part of the pre-surgery consultation, or at an initial screening visit
- The surgery – this is always performed by the surgeon you have met at your pre-surgery consultation
- Early post-operative review – this is to intercept and treat any problems after surgery
- Later post-operative review – once your vision has stabilized after surgery, this visit gives you a chance to discuss any residual concerns or the need for further treatment prior to discharge

Before you choose your surgeon, you should be clear about whether he or she will be present at the review consultations, or whether you will be cared for by another member of the team. You should also be clear about whether the person measuring your vision before and after surgery is a qualified optometrist.

Professional titles in eye care are confusing: ophthalmologists, optometrists, orthoptists and opticians – who are they?

Ophthalmologists – eye surgeons

Ophthalmologists are eye surgeons: medically qualified doctors who examine, diagnose and treat diseases and injuries in and around the eye, including carrying out eye surgery. Their professional body in the UK is The Royal College of Ophthalmologists. Ophthalmologists are licensed and regulated by the General Medical Council (GMC).

In the UK, after a 5 or 6-year degree course in medicine, and further general experience as a junior hospital doctor, eye surgeons undergo a 7-year specialist surgical and medical training. This includes professional (FRCOphth) exams, and leads to the Certificate of Specialist Training (CST) in ophthalmology. The last year of eye surgical training in the UK is specialized in a particular area and is called fellowship training. Many eye surgeons also do a research degree (MD or PhD) and supplementary fellowship training in the UK or overseas to prepare for a consultant career as an expert in one of the following main areas:

- Cornea** – including eye surface disease, cataract and refractive surgery
- Glaucoma** – early diagnosis, medical and surgical glaucoma treatment
- Oculoplastics** – surgery to the eyelids and tissues around the eye
- Medical retina** – diabetic eye disease, macular degeneration, and uveitis
- Surgical retina** – retinal detachment repair and vitreous gel surgery
- Strabismus and Paediatrics** – squint correction and eye care for children
- Neuro-ophthalmology** – specialists in neurological diseases and the eye

Most eye surgeons performing vision correction surgery (refractive surgery) are cornea specialists.

If you are having vision correction surgery, your surgeon is responsible for helping you choose which procedure is best for you, and should meet you at least one week before the surgery itself to discuss this procedure choice. He or she is then responsible for the surgery, and every aspect of your care until you are discharged from review or formally transferred to the care of another ophthalmologist. Some aspects of your follow-up care may be delegated, either to another surgeon or a specially trained optometrist, but they should have a clear line of communication with your surgeon and he or she remains responsible for your care.

You should be clear about who your surgeon is, which visits they will lead, and which follow up visits will be delegated to another member of the team, before you agree to undergo surgery.

Optometrists - specialists in examining eyes and vision

Optometrists (formerly known as ophthalmic opticians) are not doctors. They are specialists in examining your eyes and interpreting tests to prescribe spectacles and contact lenses. They are also trained to detect common eye health problems. Their professional body in the UK is the College of Optometrists, and they are regulated by the General Optical Council (GOC).

In the UK, optometrists study for 3 or 4-years for a bachelor's or master's degree in optometry and undergo a period of supervised training of about a year, which is assessed in the workplace and through a practical examination. Some optometrists go on to take further qualifications in areas such as glaucoma and contact lenses and work in multi-specialty teams in a variety of specialist services. The optometrist's role may include, diagnosis, treatment (including prescribing some medicines), interpretation of specialised imaging tests and postoperative eye examination.

Accurate measurement of vision and focus correction is central to successful vision correction surgery. Most eye surgeons therefore work closely with optometrists in ensuring that you receive the highest level of care.

Other staff

Opticians – dispensing opticians are trained to translate the numbers in your spectacle prescription into comfortable spectacles. Some dispensing opticians have done additional qualifications to enable them to fit contact lenses, but dispensing opticians do not normally examine you to see which spectacles you need. Dispensing opticians often work as technicians performing imaging tests in clinics providing vision correction surgery, and may be trained to give preliminary advice about which procedure you are suitable for based on the results of these tests.

Nursing staff – nurses with an operating theatre background work closely with eye surgeons ensuring that all the correct checks are performed prior your surgery, maintaining a clean and safe surgical environment, and assisting during surgery.

Orthoptists – are non-medical staff with specialist training in the measurement and diagnosis of eye movement problems and monitoring visual development in children. You may need to see an orthoptist before surgery if you have a tendency to squint or are relying on spectacles to control double vision.

Ophthalmic Technicians – are trained staff from a variety of backgrounds. Like opticians or optometrists, they perform specific diagnostic investigations, which are evaluated by the surgeon before and after surgery.

Advisers – office staff with experience in looking after vision surgery patients are normally your first point of contact with a vision correction clinic, giving telephone advice about how to prepare for your consultation and answering basic questions about your suitability for surgery.

These team members may also be trained to provide advice on preparing for surgery after the pre-surgical consultation and what to do after surgery. But responsibility for your care remains with your operating surgeon from your first consultation until your follow-up is complete. If you are unsure about advice you have been given at any stage, there should be an open line of communication with your surgeon to ensure that your questions are answered.

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