

ophthalmology



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OPHTHALMOLOGY

Background

Ophthalmology was the “first” branch of medicine to establish a specialty organization and develop specialty board examinations. It has also been in the forefront in medical progress and innovations. This is due in part to the relationship these physicians have with their patients as the scope of the practice includes both medical and surgery, treatment of pediatrics and adults, and highly specialized care for specific types of patients

Ophthalmology deals with the structure, function, diagnosis and treatment of the eye and the visual system. It provides patients with total eye care using medical, surgical and rehabilitative services. There are various subspecialties for ophthalmologists: cornea and external disease, glaucoma, neuro-ophthalmology, ophthalmic pathology, ophthalmic plastic surgery, pediatric ophthalmology and vitreoretinal disease.

Profile

Of the 56 ophthalmologists surveyed, 88 percent are certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology.

Eighty-nine percent of the ophthalmologists surveyed said they became interested in the specialty while they were in medical school. Fifty-five percent considered one or more of the surgical specialties and 39 percent considered internal medicine.

Eighty-nine percent of these physicians said they are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their specialty.

Eighty-seven percent of the respondents are male (13 percent female) with an overall average age of 47.

Perspectives*What aspects of ophthalmology are most appealing?*

Ophthalmologists enjoy many aspects of their work. Twenty-five percent said they particularly like the combination of medicine and surgery. Another 25 percent indicated their contribution to patients health as an appealing aspect. Twenty-one percent like the opportunity to see rapid results.

One physician said, "Set hours, few emergencies, challenging surgery, and all with the ability to have long lasting relationships with patients." Another said, "The enjoyment of 'Helping People' see better is very rewarding along with the diverse procedures. To top it off my practice does not require long hours."

What aspects of ophthalmology are least appealing?

Respondents did mention three concerns: excessive regulation by third parties (34 percent), paperwork (27 percent), and the business side related to billing issues (25 percent).

"You need to be a '15 minute' doctor in today's medical environment which dilutes the personal contact I enjoy," said one respondent.

What would you advise students to consider carefully before selecting ophthalmology?

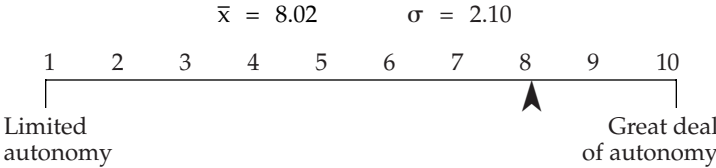
In their comments, the ophthalmologists surveyed stressed three themes: They believe one needs to review the supply and demand for their specialty in given regions, they feel hemmed in by regulation and they worry about the volume of eye care being performed by non-doctors. Physicians urged students to consider the future role of ophthalmology. Still others invited students to review the specter of managed care programs

On the positive side, the physicians surveyed said lifestyle and flexibility are important reasons to consider ophthalmology. They indicated that it is possible to tailor the practice to your interests and needs and still make a very good living.

CRITICAL FACTORS

Autonomy

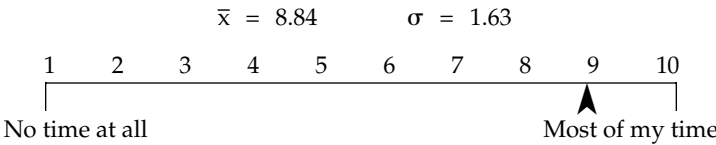
Despite complaints about third-party regulation, 67 percent of the respondents said they have substantial autonomy, and only 3 percent said their autonomy is limited. "Autonomy is dictated by the environment you work in," explained one ophthalmologist.



Caring for Patients

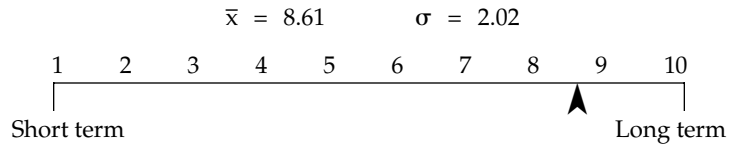
Eighty-five percent of the ophthalmologists surveyed said they spend most of their work time seeing and caring for patients

One ophthalmologist detailed the "opportunities are endless from preventive care to corrective aspects to surgery to new horizons - all with direct patient care.



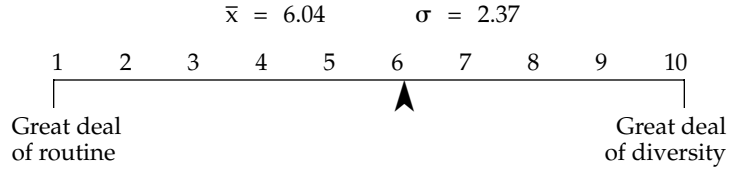
Continuity of Care

Eighty percent of the physicians surveyed said their relationships with patients are generally long-term. Two percent reported having short-term patient relationships.



Diversity

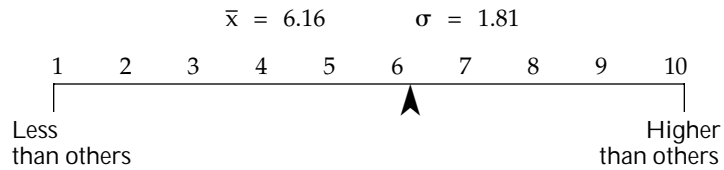
Thirty-three percent of the respondents said their work provides a great deal of diversity, while 16 percent said the work is mostly routine. One physician said that ophthalmologists can structure their practices to emphasize either diversity or generalization, depending upon their skills and interests.



Income

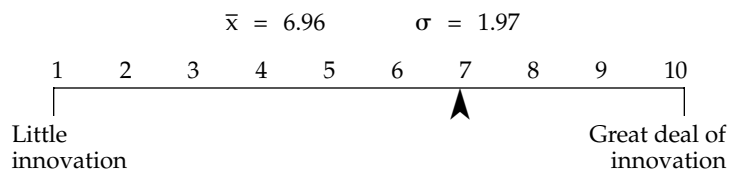
Some of the respondents are worried about their earning potential for the future. Eighty-four percent of the respondents feel that their income is comparable to others. Thirteen percent feel that their income is higher than that of other specialists. However, most of the ophthalmologists surveyed said their income provides a comfortable living.

The average pre-tax income for the surveyed ophthalmologists from their 1998 medical practices was \$228,000.



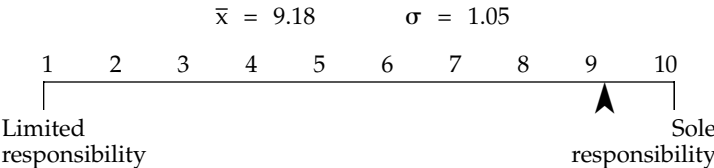
Innovative Thinking

Over half of the physicians surveyed said innovation is a big factor in ophthalmology. This means they are constantly trying to stay up-to-date with the amazing advances the specialty has become known for.



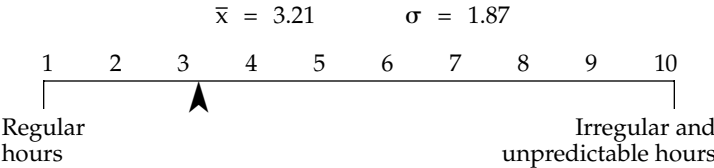
Responsibility

Most of the physicians surveyed (93 percent) feel sole responsibility for their patients. Some commented that being part of a group practice enabled them to share responsibility. But one respondent said that patients are very loyal to a single physician.



Schedule

Respondents indicated that most surgery is elective, and that scheduled office hours are relatively easy to maintain. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents felt that their schedules are regular and easy to maintain.

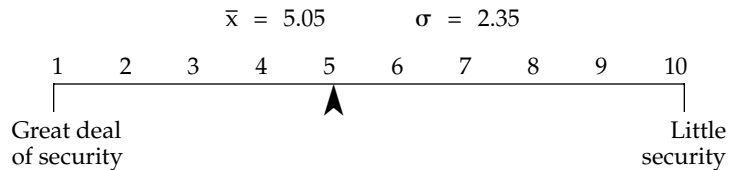


According to the survey, ophthalmologists spend their work week as follows:

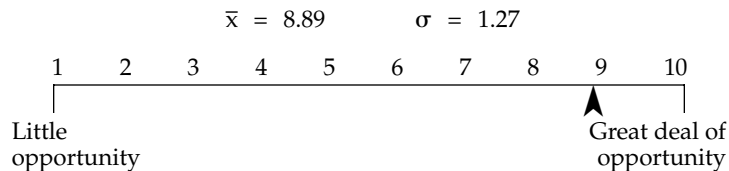
Activity	Average Hours Per Week
Patient care	38
On call	23
Administrative activities	5
Professional activities (i.e., teaching, consulting, research)	3
Professional travel (i.e., en route to hospital, meetings)	3
Continuing education	2
Community service activities	1

Security

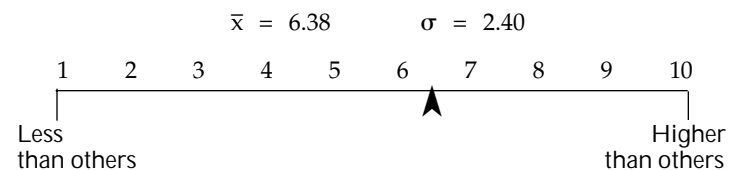
"Security is present - but we all are looking for ways to make it better," said one respondent. Most of the physicians surveyed also feel reasonably secure for the short term. But their comments indicate that they are concerned about the possible long-term effects of professional supply and demand, managed-care plans, high-pressure advertising, cuts in Medicare and the squeeze they feel optometry is making on their potential clientele.

***Sense of Accomplishment***

Ophthalmologists enjoy a high rate of success in restoring or improving the vision of the patients who come to them for care. Physicians in the survey agree, as noted earlier, that there are few things more satisfying than that. Ninety-three percent said they have great opportunities to see end results.

***Status Among Colleagues***

Although they have relatively little contact with other physicians, ophthalmologists feel their specialty is held in fairly high regard by other specialists.



Patient Characteristics and Types of Illnesses

Ophthalmologists treat patients in all age groups, although most of their work involves problems more common among people over 65.

Age Group of Patients Average (%)

Infants	3
Children	8
Adults	40
Elderly	50

The physicians surveyed treat more females (54 percent) than males (46 percent). Sixty-eight percent of their patients are classified as generally healthy, 7 percent acutely ill, 23 percent chronically ill and 2 percent terminally ill. Fifty percent are affiliated with a group practice and 45 percent work with managed care groups.

Although their specialty has a narrow focus, ophthalmologists treat a variety of diseases, injuries and other problems affecting the eyes.

Among the conditions they treat most frequently are:

1. Cataracts
2. Glaucoma
3. Diabetic retinopathy
4. Macular degeneration
5. Refractive error

Among the problems they find most challenging to treat are:

1. Glaucoma
2. Diabetic retinopathy
3. Macular degeneration
4. Cataracts
5. Retinal problems

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Malpractice Premiums

The ophthalmologists surveyed paid an average of \$8,580 for malpractice insurance in 1998. This fee varies according to practice setting.

Training Requirements

The AMA's 1999-2000 Graduate Medical Education Directory lists 127 accredited training programs in ophthalmology. The Ophthalmology Matching Program was established in order to coordinate appointments in ophthalmology and is different from the National Resident Matching Program. A physician entering this specialty has to undergo a minimum of four years of post-graduate training--one of these years is applied to general medicine disciplines. Three or more of these years are spent in specialized medical, surgical, and refractive training and experience before taking the exam administered by the American Board of Ophthalmology.

Both a written and an oral exam are required for certification. The certification is valid for 10 years.

Professional Organizations

American Board of Ophthalmology
111 Presidential Blvd
Suite 241
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004
Phone: (610) 664-1175
Fax: (610) 664-6503
Email: mrladden@abop.org
Internet: www.abop.org

American Academy of Ophthalmology
P.O. Box 7424
San Francisco, CA 94120-7424
Phone: (415) 561-8500
Fax: (415) 561-8533
Email: media@aao.org
www.eyenet.org

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Which Medical Specialist for You? The American Board of Medical Specialties, 1995.

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Medical Practice 1997/98, AMA Center for Health Policy Research, 1998.

Physicians Marketplace Statistics 1997/98, AMA Center for Health Policy Research, 1998.

Physician Characteristics and Distribution in the US, AMA 1999.

How to Choose a Medical Specialty, Anita D. Taylor, 2nd edition, W.B. Saunders Co., PA, 1993.

Getting into a Residency: A Guide for Medical Students, Kenneth V. Isserson, 4th edition, Galen Press Ltd., AZ, 1996.

AAMC DATA BOOKS: Statistical Information Related to Medical Schools and Teaching Hospitals, AAMC, Washington DC, 1999.

The American Board of Ophthalmology, Brochure, 1998.

Mean Scores for Critical Factors

Autonomy	8.02	Manual/Mechanical	
Caring for Patients	8.84	Activities	7.73
Continuity of Care	8.61	Pressure	6.32
Diversity	6.04	Responsibility	9.18
Family/Leisure Time	7.25	Schedule	3.21
Focus of Expertise	8.88	Security	5.05
Income	6.16	Sense of	
Innovative Thinking	6.96	Accomplishment	8.89
Intellectual Content	5.05	Status Among	
Interacting with Other Physicians	4.48	Colleagues	6.38

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Exercise

After you have finished the above career option profile, please complete the following exercise:

- ◆ List your top five Critical Factors below;
- ◆ In Column A, list the rating you gave each of these factors in your Briefing Document;
- ◆ In Column B, list the mean scores for each factor as found in the above profile;
- ◆ Subtract the items in Column B from those in Column A and write the remainder in Column C;
- ◆ Total the numbers in Column C. **NOTE:** Ignore + and – signs.

The closer the number at the bottom is to “0,” the more likely it is that this specialty may be a match for you and requires your further investigation. This total alone, however, means very little until you have compared it with those from each specialty profile.

Critical Factors	A (Your Rating)	B (Mean Scores)	C (Differences)
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
		Total:	_____