The state of optometry in Washington state - A survey

Thomas A. Myers
Pacific University

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The state of optometry in Washington state - A survey

Abstract
A ten-question survey was developed to analyze the viability and future of the optometric profession within the state of Washington. The survey was sent to optometrists in the King and Spokane counties. Overall a 40% response rate was obtained. Specifically, 44% (22 of 50) from Spokane County optometrists and 36% (18 of 50) from King County optometrists. Results comparing the counties side by side indicate the members are satisfied in Washington with only slight differences between the counties.

Degree Type
Thesis

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THE STATE OF OPTOMETRY IN WASHINGTON STATE—A SURVEY

By

THOMAS A. MYERS

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the
College of Optometry
Pacific University
Forest Grove, Oregon
for the degree of Doctor of Optometry
May 2003

Faculty Advisor:

Lee Ann Remington, O. D., F.A.A.O.
THE STATE OF OPTOMETRY IN WASHINGTON STATE - A SURVEY

Author: Thomas A. Myers
Author Signature: [Signature]

Faculty Advisor: Lee Ann Remington, O. D., F.A.A.O.
Faculty Advisor Signature: [Signature]
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

I graduated from the University of Washington in 1987 and was awarded a degree in molecular biology. In 1997 I decided to enter optometry school and in 1999 was accepted. Having been born and raised in Spokane, Washington I wanted to eventually practice where I enjoyed living.

I asked myself, “Is Spokane a good place for a new optometrist? Will I be able to earn a living in my hometown? Is it practical for me to settle here after optometry school?” To answer these questions and others a survey was developed and sent to practicing optometrists within the state.

As the survey developed it became clear other young men and women, in pre-optometry, contemplating their futures may have some of the same questions I had.
ABSTRACT

A ten-question survey was developed to analyze the viability and future of the optometric profession within the state of Washington.

The survey was sent to optometrists in the King and Spokane counties. Overall a 40% response rate was obtained. Specifically, 44% (22 of 50) from Spokane County optometrists and 36% (18 of 50) from King County optometrists.

Results comparing the counties side by side indicate the members are satisfied in Washington with only slight differences between the counties.
BACKGROUND

A profession by definition consists of members who have been through years of higher education, are committed to serve the public and consist of a self-governing body. Traditionally strong professions have active associations. An active association can be politically influential in establishing greater privileges for its profession. It also helps provide additional continuing education opportunities and helps promote community awareness regarding the profession. On a smaller scale local chapters of the profession have these same goals in maintaining the principles of its members.

In order to assess the overall career satisfaction as an optometrist, individual active participation within the profession and future career opportunities a survey was developed. Specific counties within Washington State were targeted.

The results as follows imply optometrists from their respective regions look upon optometry as a profession in a favorable light.

You will find results presented here in the same sequence they were ordered on the survey. At the end of the manuscript (Appendix A) you will find a copy of the original cover letter and survey.

METHODS

The survey was written up on a 4.5” x 6.5” sized self-addressed post-card on sage green cardstock. It was sent with a letter of introduction to each of the one hundred randomly chosen optometrists.

Two of the largest counties in the Washington were chosen as target areas for the survey. Spokane County, population 400,000 and King County, population 850,000. Both counties represent the largest and most diverse counties in the state in terms of population and demographics. Geographically the counties are on opposite sides of the state with Spokane County representing the east and King County representing the west.

Fifty optometrists from each county were randomly selected from a clearinghouse list of Washington State optometrists, broken down by county. Responders were asked to indicate on the survey which county they practiced in. Response rates were calculated by county and by a combined overall response rate. Responses were separated and analyzed by county, side by side and/or collectively as one combined group of optometrists from the state.

Results of questions 1 through 5 were analyzed by a weighted mean value numbering system commonly used in survey analysis. Questions 6 through 10 were broken down by percentages and analyzed by bar graphical analysis.
RESULTS

Optometrists from two separate counties of Washington State rate their career satisfaction in the optometric profession as high. Both counties perceive their respective local optometric associations as active but personal involvement within those local chapters as moderately below active participation.

King county optometrists perceive their continuing education opportunities as greater than that of their Spokane colleagues. However both rate their continuing education opportunities moderately above average to quite above average but not excellent.

As the profession evolves so does the utilization of auxiliary personnel as reflected in the responses regarding technical support. Both counties tend to utilize such support quite extensively.

Both counties perceive short-term opportunities, over the next five years, for new optometrists to be less than ideal but over the next ten to fifteen years' career opportunities vastly improve. Spokane County's outlook has a significantly brighter outlook than King County.

As a young optometrist entering the field it is pleasing to know that the overall impression of professional respect between optometrists and ophthalmologists was rated as good to excellent.

Both counties rated their patient population base as adequate and of those who responded there exists a wide variety of practice modes amongst the optometric profession. They include managed care, multidisciplinary settings, solo practices and partnerships. Indeed evidence that our profession is truly evolving. Interestingly no respondents indicated they practiced in a commercial environment.

Finally it is telling that when asked if they were to do things all over again nearly 70% of the optometrists would choose to practice optometry within their respective regions.

Rate your overall career satisfaction as an optometrist

Satisfaction was rated using a number system commonly used in survey distributions. A range of 1 being not satisfied to 5 being highly satisfied. A weighted mean was used to analyze the numbers. Both King and Spokane counties had scores of 4.20. A 4.20 represents a response of quite satisfied with their profession regardless of their mode of practice or locale.

Rate the activity of your local Optometric Association

Activity was rated on a scale of 1 to 5 with one rating the association as having low activity and five rating the association as being quite active. Spokane County doctors rate their local chapter with a weighted mean of 3.65 compared to 3.50 for King County.
Rate your personal participation in your local Optometric Association

The results indicate that of those who responded, the majority of personal participation fell in the range of not being active to that of being moderately active for both counties queried. Spokane County rated personal participation at 2.50 versus 2.40 for King County. The range extended from 1 for not being active to 5 for being very active. A three suggests participation was moderately active.

Rate professional continuing education opportunities in your local region

Not surprisingly King County optometrists rated their opportunities higher than their peers in the Spokane County region by a count of 4.20 versus 3.45. A rating of 1 was equivalent to poor and 5 to excellent continuing education opportunities.

Rate the utilization of auxiliary personal in your practice

Perhaps a reflection of the growing maturity of the profession as both counties appear to utilize auxiliary personal to the same degree; 3.70 for King County doctors and 3.80 for their cross state colleagues of Spokane County. A rating of 1 means not utilized and that of 5 is very utilized.

Rate future career opportunities for aspiring optometrists in your local region over the next five, ten and fifteen years.

Over 40% of optometrists from both regions have rated opportunities for employment as poor with a general trend of improving opportunities over the next ten to fifteen years. Looking at Figure A, page 7 one sees that 72% of Spokane optometrists have rated opportunities in their region as good and another 14% have rated them as excellent.

In King County the trend appears to continue but not quite at the same level of optimism. Indeed Spokane County has a significantly higher rating in regards to the next ten to fifteen years.

Figures B, C and D on page 8 examine perceived professional relationships between optometrists and ophthalmologists, patient base per optometrist and modes of practice.

Encouragingly Figure B indicates there exists a high percentage of optometrists who rate their professional relationship with their medical colleagues as good to excellent. Combined numbers from both counties show that over 90% of optometrists have fair to excellent relationships with their medical colleagues and less than 5% deem their relationships as poor.

Figure C indicates that the survey respondents perceived both King and Spokane Counties as having the patient base necessary to support an aspiring optometrist. Ideally there should be approximately 7000 people per optometrist.
However the significant factor here is that an overwhelming number of respondents perceive their regions as having the necessary numbers to support an optometrist. Indeed combined numbers indicate that 60% of the doctors believe there exists an average patient base to support a doctor and only 13% perceive that patient base as below average.

*Figure D* indicates the majority of optometrists who responded practice in a solo-practice and interestingly none of the respondents indicated they were in commercial practices. The significance lies not in the number of doctors per mode as much as how many different modes there are. Evidence that the profession is maturing and expanding.

Finally *Figure E, page 9* shows that if doctors were to do it all over again over 60% would absolutely choose to practice optometry in their respective regions and only 5% would not choose to do so. Evidence that this is a profession worth pursuing and this state is one in which to practice.

**CONCLUSION**

As the profession evolves and optometry gains additional privileges it is likely the patient base will expand. These factors all lead to increased utilization of auxiliary personnel and staff.

In regards to the low ratings of personal participation within local optometric chapters, it is difficult to speculate just what these low ratings indicate. Low ratings may suggest poor opportunities for involvement within local chapters, apathy among members to participate, a position of status quo with the operation of the local chapter or a combination of the above.

King County optometrists are likely exposed to a greater degree of continuing education opportunities as is reflected by the rating values. King County has a vast array of hospitals, universities and ophthalmic supply houses compared to Spokane County.

The survey indicates there exists good professional respect between optometrists and ophthalmologists. Indication perhaps that as the optometric profession evolves a greater mutual respect and understanding is forming between these two facets of eye care.

It is my hope that the survey provides some insight as to the health of the profession within Washington State and perhaps can be extrapolated to other regions of the country. It is unlikely that Washington State optometrists alone hold these perceptions. Indeed, similar findings may be found in other areas where state demographics and politics are similar to the state of Washington.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of those who took the time to read my cover letter and respond to the survey as I requested. I too would like to thank Dr. Lee Ann Remington for her patience and guidance over the past four years.
Figure A: Rate future career opportunities for aspiring optometrists in your local region.
Figure B: Rate professional camaraderie between ODs, general ophthalmologists and specialty ophthalmologists in your local region.

Figure C: Rate your local region in terms of patient base per OD.

Figure D: Indicate the type of practice in which you are involved.
Figure E: If you were to do it all over again would you practice in your current area?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokane</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
July 2002

Dear Doctor,

Hello, my name is Thomas Myers. I am a fourth year optometry student at Pacific University College of Optometry. As part of my thesis project I am collecting information regarding the viability of the Optometric profession within different regions of Washington State.

I appreciate your time and ask that you take a moment to complete and place in the mail the enclosed posted self-addressed survey. Thank you very much.

Respectfully yours,

Thomas Myers
Optometric Intern

Lee Ann Remington, O. D., F.A.A.O.
Faculty Advisor
Please complete the following questionnaire:

1. Rate your overall career satisfaction as an optometrist.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Satisfied</td>
<td>Somewhat Satisfied</td>
<td>Highly Satisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Rate the activity of your local Optometric Association.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Wish It Were More Active</td>
<td>Somewhat Active</td>
<td>Quite Active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Rate your personal participation in your local Optometric Association.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Active</td>
<td>Somewhat Active</td>
<td>Very Active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

4. Rate professional CE opportunities in your local region.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Rate the utilization of auxiliary personnel in your practice.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Utilized</td>
<td>Somewhat Utilized</td>
<td>Very Utilized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Rate future career opportunities for aspiring optometrists in your local region.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. 5 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 10 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. 15 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Rate professional camaraderie between ODs, general ophthalmologists and specialty ophthalmologists in your local region.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. Rate your local region in terms of patient base per OD.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Above Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
<th>Do Not Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. Please indicate the type of practice in which you are involved.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solo Practice</th>
<th>Partnership</th>
<th>Commercial</th>
<th>Employed by MD</th>
<th>Managed Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. If you were to do it all over again would you choose to practice in your current area?
    
    | Absolutely | Not Sure | No |
    |------------|---------|----|

11. Please indicate the Region in which you are practicing.
    
    | King County | Spokane County |
    |--------------|----------------|

THANK YOU