

Multidisciplinary diabetes eye care services through the Australian College of Optometry

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Background:

Diabetic eye disease is a major cause of vision loss in Australia. However, with early detection and timely treatment, 98% of vision loss can be prevented. Optometrists play a fundamental role in early detection of diabetic eye disease and collaborating with health practitioners to minimise risk of vision loss.

Unfortunately, not all people with diabetes have their eyes examined according to NHMRC guidelines, particularly people experiencing disadvantage.

The Australian College of Optometry (ACO) provides quality and affordable eye care services to people experiencing disadvantage, in clinics throughout metropolitan Melbourne, visiting Outreach and Aboriginal services, and a network of rural private optometry practices. This includes work within public hospital multidisciplinary diabetes clinics with the aims of detecting and managing diabetic eye disease for patients who otherwise might not present for eye examinations.

Methods:

Since 2010, optometry services have been provided at weekly endocrinology clinics at the Austin Hospital. In 2012, services were expanded to Dandenong Hospital in conjunction with the Monash Health Young Adults Diabetes Service where optometrists attend monthly. At these multidisciplinary diabetes clinics, patients have the opportunity to see the endocrinologist, optometrist, dietitian, diabetes nurse educator, social worker and pharmacist.

Results:

To date, there have been a total of 831 diabetic eye examinations through ACO services at public hospitals. The importance of these ongoing services is highlighted in the high levels of diabetic retinopathy detected. 30% of patients showed some degree of diabetic retinopathy; 47% of these were referred for ophthalmology treatment.

Discussion:

As well as providing diabetic eye examinations for patients presenting to established optometry clinics, ACO also provides alternative models of care for diabetic eye disease. Optometry services within multidisciplinary public hospital diabetes clinics allow patients who may not regularly access eye care the opportunity to have a diabetic eye examination during their hospital endocrinology visit.